NATION

17 Indians lured into illegal work in Laos return home, says EAM

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BUSINESS

India-Singapore bilateral trade grew 18.2% to $35.6B

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Buttler's ton triumphs Kohli's historic century as RR ease past RCB

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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China plans to use AI to disrupt polls: Microsoft

Microsoft added that North Korea is backing China's plan

NEW YORK, 6 APRIL

China is likely to deploy Artificial Intelligence-generated content via social media to sway public opinion to boost its geopolitical interests during elections in countries like India, South Korea and the US, tech giant Microsoft has warned.

Voting for 543 Lok Sabha seats in India will take place between April 19 and June 4, spread across seven phases.

South Koreans will go to the polls in a general election on 10 April while the US will hold the Presidential election on 5 November.

"With major elections taking place around the world this year, particularly in India, South Korea and the United States, we assess that China will, at a minimum, create and amplify AI-generated content to benefit its interests," Clint Watts, General Manager, Microsoft Threat Analysis Center, said in a blog post.

Despite the chances of such content in affecting election results remaining low, China's increasing experimentation in augmenting memes, videos, and audio will likely continue – and may prove more effective down the line, he said.

China will do it along with North Korea, he wrote.

These are among the Microsoft Threat Intelligence insights in the latest East Asia report published on Wednesday by the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center (MTAC).

China is using fake social media accounts to poll voters on what divides them most to sow division and possibly influence the outcome of the US presidential election in its favour.

China has also increased its use of AI-generated content to further its goals around the world.

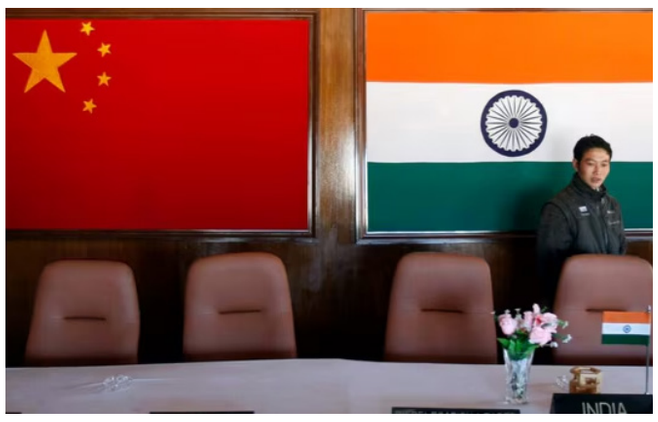
North Korea has increased its cryptocurrency heists and supply chain attacks to fund and further its military goals and intelligence collection. It has also begun to use AI to make its operations more effective and efficient.

Beijing will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in October, and North Korea will continue to push forward key advanced weapons programmes, the report said.

"Meanwhile, as populations in India, South Korea, and the United States head to the polls, we are likely to see Chinese cyber and influence actors, and to some extent, North Korean cyber actors, work toward targeting these elections," it said.

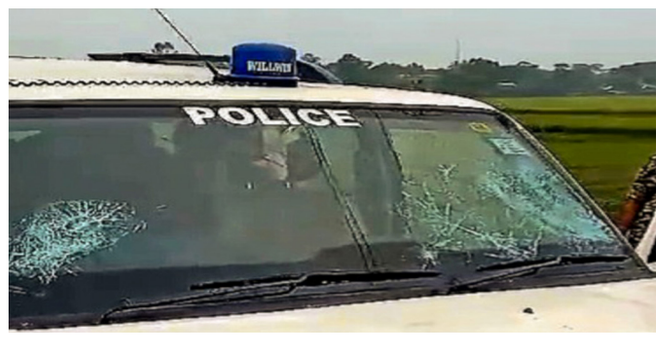
China will, at a minimum, create and amplify AI-generated content that benefits its positions in these high-profile elections, it said.

—PTI



China has also increased its use of AI-generated content to further its goals around the world **PHOTO: SALAR**

AFTER ATTACK ON ED TEAM



A police vehicle after it was attacked by villagers during NIA's investigation into the 2022 blast case, on Saturday **PHOTO: ANI**

NIA team probing blast case allegedly attacked in Bengal

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

National Investigation Agency on Saturday arrested two key conspirators in a 2022 blast case amid an attack on the probe agency's team by a crowd in West Bengal's East Medinipore district, an official said here.

An NIA officer was injured and a vehicle belonging to the probe agency was damaged in the attack, a spokesperson of the federal investigating agency said.

Saturday's incident brought back memories of 5 January when three officials of the Enforcement Directorate were attacked by a mob in North 24 Parganas district's Sandeshkhali during a search on the premises of then Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh in connection with alleged irregularities in the public distribution system. The duo -- Balai Charan Maity and Manobrata Jana -- were arrested after extensive searches at five locations, including the house of Jana, where locals tried to obstruct the NIA team.

The crowd tried to stop the NIA team and its security component from moving towards the Bhupatinagar police station to complete the arrest formalities. The NIA has lodged a complaint at the local police station in this regard. The NIA spokesperson said Jana and Maity were found to have conspired to manufacture and explode crude bombs to spread terror. *—PTI*

NIA officials attacked villagers: Didi

Balurghat, 6 April

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday accused NIA officials of attacking villagers at Bhupatinagar in Purba Medinipur district and not the other way round. Claiming that officials of the central probe agency had barged into several houses in the early hours over an incident of "bursting of crackers in 2022", she defended the villagers' response as self-defence.

PHOTO: PTI

Srinagar's Jamia Masjid closed ahead of Shab-e-Qadr

SRINAGAR, 6 APRIL

A day after Jumatul-Vida prayers were disallowed in Srinagar's Jamia Masjid, the authorities on Saturday closed the gates of the historic mosque ahead of the Shab-e-Qadr, which will be observed later tonight. Police asked people to vacate mosque premises after the gates were closed. "Authorities closed the gates of Jamia Masjid while the police asked people to vacate the mosque premises. The Auqaf was informed that the observance of taraweeh or Shab Khani on the auspicious occasion of Shab-E-Qadr will not be permitted at the Jama Masjid," Anjuman Auqaf Jamia Masjid Srinagar said in a statement. The last Friday prayers of this Ramadan were not allowed to be held at the mosque by authorities and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, head of the mosque management body who was scheduled to lead the prayers, was placed under house arrest. *—PTI*

OVER GUARDIAN REPORT

Pak slams Rajnath's 'killing suspects across border' remark

ISLAMABAD, 6 APRIL

Pakistan has denounced "provocative remarks" made by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who said in an interview that India would enter Pakistan to kill anyone who escapes over its border after trying to carry out attacks.

Singh's comments on Friday came after the Guardian newspaper published a report stating that India had killed about 20 people in Pakistan since 2020 as part of a broader plan to target "terrorists residing on foreign soil".

"India's assertion of its preparedness to extra-judicially execute more civilians, arbitrarily pronounced as 'terrorists', inside Pakistan constitutes a clear admission of culpability," Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Saturday.

The ministry also said that such "myopic and irresponsible behaviour" not only undermines regional peace but also impedes the prospect of constructive engagement in the long term.

"Pakistan stands resolute in its intent and ability to safeguard its sovereignty against any act of aggression," the ministry added.

During his interview with local broadcaster CNN News18 on Friday, Singh was asked about the Guardian report, and responded: "If they run away to Pakistan, we will enter Pakistan to kill them."

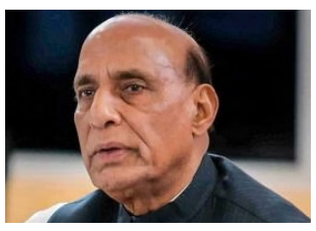
"India always wants to maintain good relations with its neighbouring countries. But if anyone shows India the angry eyes again and again, comes to India and tries to promote terrorist activities, we will not spare them," Singh added.

"It is imperative for the international community to hold India accountable for its heinous and illegal actions," Pakistan said'.

Relations between India and Pakistan have worsened since a 2019 suicide bombing of military convoy in Kashmir was traced to Pakistan-based fighters and prompted New Delhi to carry out an air raid on what it said was a fighter base in Pakistan.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI



Rajnath Singh PHOTO: PTI

- The Ministry also said that such "myopic and irresponsible behaviour" not only undermines regional peace but also impedes the prospect of constructive engagement in the long term.

In manifesto, CPI vows to scrap CAA, 50% quota cap

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

Communist Party of India (CPI) released its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday, promising to scrap the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, remove the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs, and enhance the daily wage under MGNREGA to Rs 700.

Left party called for the defeat of the ruling BJP to save secular democracy.

If elected to power, the CPI promised to scrap the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, remove the 50 per cent cap on reservations, conduct a caste census, introduce taxation measures such as wealth tax and inheritance tax, increase corporate tax, introduce reservation in the private sector, and raise the daily wage under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) Rs 700.

Left party said if voted to power, it will introduce measures to address the growing inequality. CPI also said it aims to bring central investigative agencies like Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) under the purview of Parliament.

—PTI

VISTARA CHIEF SAYS OVER 98% PILOTS HAVE SIGNED NEW CONTRACTS

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

The Chief Executive Officer of Vistara, Vinod Kannan, on Saturday said that the airline hopes to stabilise operations for the rest of April 2024 by this weekend, as 98 per cent of pilots have signed the new pay contract.

The airline said it has been reaching out to all customers affected by the delays and cancellations to offer relevant refunds and compensation.

A significant number of Vistara pilots had taken sick leave following the announcement of new salary rules, which coincided with the merger with Air India. The pilot shortage issue stemmed from pay cuts implemented after new flying hours regulations came into effect recently.

Due to crew shortages earlier this week, the full service carrier experienced severe operational disruptions and numerous flights were cancelled.

Vistara CEO also informed that the airline is engaging with pilots to clarify and resolve their concerns.

He asserted that this ongoing issue has not caused any visible spike in attrition amongst pilots. *—ANI*

Leh Apex Body cancels border march in Ladakh

LEH, 6 APRIL

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) Saturday withdrew their proposed march to the Changthang border with China on 7 April, saying it is doing so in the interest of people even as it accused the administration of turning Leh into a "war zone". The LAB said they have already achieved their objective of creating awareness among the people of the country about the plight of farmers. They said the farmers are losing prime pasture land to huge industrial plants in the south and "Chinese encroachments" in the north. They said they will continue their peaceful peaceful agitation in support of their various demands, especially statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the sixth schedule of the Constitution.

>>>More on Page 4

—PTI

2 test +ve for cholera after 47 students hospitalised

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

Two students from Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute who were hospitalised with others after they complained of loose stools and dehydration have tested positive for cholera, officials said on Saturday.

This comes a day after 47 students from the same institute were hospitalised with similar symptoms.

Dr Padma MR of the state surveillance unit, under the Department of Health and Family Welfare, said that the cultures of two students have come back positive for cholera.

Following the incident, Principal Secretary of Medical Education Department and the Chairperson of Women's Commission visited the hospital and the Girls Hostel.

According to Ramesh Krishna, Dean and Director of BMCRI, 47 students from the Institute's girls' hostel were admitted to Victoria Hospital on Friday.

All of them suffered from loose stools and dehydration. They have been diagnosed with acute gastroenteritis.

Krishna said disinfection of the kitchen was being carried out after closing it. Food and water was being supplied from Victoria Hospital kitchen. Pest control measures are also being taken, he said.

The Karnataka Health and Family Welfare Department had on Friday said that six confirmed cases of cholera have been reported in the state so far this year of which five were reported in March.

Amid reports that extreme heat compounded with the water crisis has led to a scare of a cholera outbreak, the department however clarified that all these cases are "sporadic" and that there was no outbreak. *—PTI*

PARTIES AVOID STATE

No campaign, rallies in Manipur

IMPHAL, 6 APRIL

Posters of political parties, mega rallies and visible movement of leaders -- the traditional elements of campaigning -- are conspicuously missing in violence-hit Manipur where polling for Lok Sabha elections is due in less than two weeks.

The only visible hint of the impending election is the hoardings put up by local election authorities, urging citizens to exercise their franchise.

Amid the muted election fervour, major party figures have refrained from visiting the conflict-ridden state to canvass for votes or make electoral pledges.

While BJP has enlisted prominent figures like Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah as star campaigners, Congress lineup includes Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and other key leaders.

Posters by EC in Manipur ahead of Lok Sabha polls **PHOTO: PTI**

However, none of them have any appearance in Manipur yet. Though the Election Commission of Manipur maintained that there are no official restrictions on campaigning activities, party representatives emphasised the need for subdued campaigning to avoid aggravating the delicate situation in the state.

The candidates -- BJP's Thounaojam Basanta Kumar Singh, Congress' Angomcha Bimol Akoijam, Republican Party of India's Maheshwar Thounaojam and Rajmukar Somendro Singh who is backed by the Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP) -- have come up with a unique solution.

—PTI

UNFORTUNATE THAT INDIA WANTS TO FIGHT SHAKTI: PM

SAHARANPUR, 6 APRIL

It is the country's misfortune that leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc are openly talking about "fighting against shakti", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday.

Addressing an election rally in Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, he said, "Ours is the place of Maa Shakti... In every corner of Hindustan, worshipping shakti is a part of our natural spiritual journey. We are a country which never shuns the worship of Shakti."

Gandhi had said by 'shakti' he meant "power" and accused the Prime Minister of twisting his words.

In his address on Saturday, Modi said, "Can anyone finish shakti, challenge the power of shakti? And, those who made an effort to destroy shakti, what happened to them? It is mentioned in history and the Puranas."

—PTI

>>>More on Page 3

Car rental business owner ends life

MYSURU, 6 APRIL

A vehicle rental business owner committed suicide in Rajiv Nagar here on Friday after allegedly being deceived by individuals who rented one of his cars. Mujahid Pasha penned a death note before ending his life. Mujahid had leased his Innova car to Asghar Pasha and Sallu, in addition to extending them a loan. However, it has been alleged that the tenants not only pawned the rented vehicle but also defaulted on repaying the loan amount. This compounded Mujahid's financial woes, forcing him to end his life. Mujahid's wife Asma lodged a complaint at Udayagiri police station, holding Asghar and Sallu accountable for her husband's tragic death. Police have registered a case. *—Salar News*

Cong never gave 'Nyay' to country: Pralhad Joshi

HUBBALLI, 6 APRIL

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Coal and Mines Pralhad Joshi on Saturday lashed out at Congress over its 'Nyay Patra' manifesto, saying the party has never given 'Nyay' (justice) to the country. "The Congress had coined slogans such as 'Garibi Hatao' (alleviation of poverty) and 'roti, kapda aur makan'(food, clothing and shelter). Have they been successful? In 2004, Congress gave another slogan 'Congress ka haath gareeb logon ke saath' (Congress is with the poor). But, ultimately, what did they do? Joshi questioned. He said during Congress rule, they indulged in corruption to the tune of Rs 12 lakh crore. "They gave nothing to the poor. They did not even do justice to the country. Their announcement of 'Nyay' slogan is ridiculous," Joshi said. He said people won't believe them even if they take out 'Nyay' slogans or yatras. Joshi is contesting from Dharwad Parliamentary seat in Lok Sabha elections. — *Salar News*

Smriti mocks Cong over fight with CPI in Kerala

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

Union Minister and BJP leader **Smriti Irani** took a jibe at Congress over its situation in Kerala, where, despite being partners in the Opposition INDIA bloc, Communist Party of India has fielded Annie Raja against Rahul Gandhi in Wayanad. Irani on Friday said on one side, the Left parties are asking Rahul Gandhi to go to Uttar Pradesh and contest, while on the other side, the same Left members hugged the Congress leader during the meeting of the INDI Alliance. During her interaction with businessmen in Bengaluru, the Union Minister said, "Yesterday (On Friday) I said in Kerala, 'Delhi mein hugging, Kerala mein begging.' The situation through which Congress is going in Karnataka is, 'Delhi mein hugging, Kerala mein begging, Karnataka mein thugging. Smriti Irani, who is also a former actress, requested that the women cast their votes in huge numbers and said casting votes is not a game of any TV serial; instead, it's a heavy responsibility. "I request all the women that if we want everyone to take women seriously in politics, then we have to pay attention to important political issues. 'Saas-Bahu' serials are far from the realities of life. Women who understand this can have a successful social and political life. The Gandhi family looted the country by clicking pictures and smiling," the Union Minister said. Raja on Wednesday filed her nomination for Lok Sabha elections from Wayanad. CPI is a partner of the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front in Kerala. *—ANI*

City MPs spend ₹55 cr for infra development

Mohan, Surya have attendance of 82%, 78%

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

The report on the MPs was released by B.PAC CEO Revathy Ashok, advocate N Harish and others on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

Three MPs representing Bengaluru City have spent Rs 55.88 crore for infrastructure development using Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds over the last 5 years, according to a report by Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC).

The report sheds light on the allocation and expenditure of Rs. 55.88 crore recommended by MPs Sadananda Gowda, PC Mohan and Tejasvi Surya from 2019 to 2024. Of the Rs 55.88 crore, Rs. 23.47 crore (42.67 per cent) was directed towards public infrastructure development, aiming to enhance the City's civic amenities.

Additionally, Rs 16.03 crore (29.15 per cent) was allocated for drinking water and sanitation, while Rs. 7.27 crore (13.22 per cent) was earmarked for education.

Gowda, representing Bengaluru North, recommended a total of Rs 18.69 crore for his constituency, with Rs 9.18 crore allocated for public infrastructure development and Rs 6.38 crore for drinking water and sanitation works. Similarly, Mohan, representing Bengaluru Central, recommended Rs 17.97 crore, with Rs. 6.58 crore allotted for drinking water and sanitation.

Surya, representing Bengaluru South, recommended Rs 19.36 crore, with the highest allocation of Rs 8.86 crore directed towards public infrastructure development.

The report also delves into the parliamentary participation of the three MPs during the 17th Lok Sabha. Mohan had an attendance of 82% and raised 147 questions, Surya had a 78% attendance and asked 188 questions. Gowda did not raise any questions and attendance was low (37%), attributed to his role as a Cabinet minister during part of the term.

The report acknowledges the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on MPLADS, with funds suspended from April 2020 to November 2021.

—Salar News

Ensure Modi steps down, Rahul becomes PM: CM

KOLAR, 6 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at a dargah in Mulbagal, Kolar, on Saturday *PHOTO: SALAR*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday asked people to ensure that Prime Minister Narendra Modi steps down after Lok Sabha polls and make Congress leader Rahul Gandhi the PM of the country.

Claiming that Congress always walks the talk and fulfils the promises made to the people, unlike BJP, he said the party will fulfil the guarantees announced in its manifesto after coming to power like it did in Karnataka under his leadership. "Congress on Friday announced guarantees, we will fulfil them too. Congress party always walks the talk, unlike the BJP....you should understand that and try to bring Congress to power at the Centre by removing the BJP government. I humbly request you to make Narendra Modi step down and make Rahul Gandhi the Prime Minister," Siddaramaiah said.

He was speaking after a roadshow here in favour of the Congress candidate from Kolar KV Gowtham after offering prayers at Kurudumale Ganapathi Temple and also at the famous mosque at Mulbagal.

Calling BJP "a factory of lies" and asking people not to fall for lies created by BJP out of fear of defeat, the Chief Minister said the five guarantee schemes implemented by his government have a five-year warranty. "We honoured your vote by keeping our word," he said.

> **Congress party always walks the talk, unlike the BJP....you should understand that and try to bring Congress to power at the Centre by removing the BJP government**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

He said though the State government was willing to purchase rice from Food Corporation of India by paying the cost, the rice was not made available for implementing the guarantee. The State government has spent around Rs 36,000 crore for the guarantee schemes and over Rs 56,000 crore would be spent in the next fiscal for implementation of these schemes, the Chief Minister said.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh, Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar and other leaders were present. *—Salar News*

'In polls, only BJP can use PM photos'

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

Leader of Opposition in State Assembly **R Ashoka** on Saturday said rebel BJP leader KS Eshwarappa, who has announced to contest as an independent candidate from Shivamogga constituency, cannot use Prime Minister Narendra Modi's photos to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

Ashoka said, "Eshwarappa cannot use Prime Minister Modi's photos. If he uses them, it is incorrect. If it is a government programme, his photos could be used. But, during elections, it is only the BJP, which has the right to use PM Modi's photos."

"Once he submits his nomination papers, action would be initiated against him. Legal action would be initiated against those who indulge in anti-party activities," he said.

Ashoka hit out at the government over the drought. "To declare drought, State government took three months. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has rightly said State government delayed sending the proposal for drought relief to the Central government. Siddaramaiah is lying and should tender resignation," he said. *—Salar News*

USING PM'S PHOTO

Eshwarappa files caveat in court

SHIVAMOGGA, 6 APRIL

BJP leader **KS Eshwarappa,** who is contesting as an independent candidate from Shivamogga seat, has filed a caveat petition in District Court. He requested the court to ensure no ex-parte order is passed if Shivamogga district BJP moves court seeking an order restricting him from using the portrait of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Lok Sabha election campaign.

There is a war of words between BJP's Shivamogga candidate BY Raghavendra, son of former chief minister BS Yediyurappa, and Eshwarappa. Raghavendra had ridiculed Eshwarappa for using Modi's photos during the campaigning. Eshwarappa responded to it, saying Modi is not the property of Raghavendra's father. Eshwarappa is upset with the BJP's decision to deny a ticket to his son KE Kanthesh to contest the Lok Sabha polls from Haveri seat. *—Salar News*

KEEPING A CHECK

CISF personnel take out a route march on SJP Road in the wake of elections and festivals, in Bengaluru on Saturday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Nomination of 3 candidates rejected

C'NAGAR, 6 APRIL

The nomination papers of three candidates contesting from Chamarajanagar (Scheduled Caste) constituency in Lok Sabha elections have been rejected while those of 22 others have been accepted after scrutiny, said Chamarajanagar District Election Officer Shilpa Nag.

Among the candidates whose nominations have been accepted are Congress candidate Sunil Bose, the son of Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa, and BJP candidate S Balaraj. Despite complaints from BJP regarding discrepancies in Bose's nomination papers, the Returning Officer has upheld his candidacy after verification, citing no irregularities.

The rejected candidates include representatives from political parties and independent candidates. The nominations of Samajwadi Party's Chamadas and non-party candidates Gurulingaiah and C Raju were invalidated.

The controversy surrounding Bose's nomination arose due to alleged discrepancies in his submitted information. It has been claimed that Bose failed to disclose details regarding his wife, children, and family members in his nomination papers. Also, crucial property details about his immediate family were purportedly omitted from the submission. Balaraju lodged a complaint with District Election Officer, urging the invalidation of Bose's nomination. *—Salar News*

Congress will reclaim Kolar seat: Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

Kolar has always been a Congress bastion and the party will reclaim the Lok Sabha seat this time, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said during a roadshow on Saturday.

Local leaders, including Ramesh Kumar, secured treated water to the district from Bengaluru, which has enhanced the lives of farmers.

Congress is committed to the welfare of the youth and it has given the ticket to a youngster (KV Gowtham) for Lok Sabha elections. "Congress candidate Gautam is educated and wise. He will take everyone with him. All of you must support him like the son of the district," Shivakumar told the gathering in Kolar.

Highlighting the 'five guarantee schemes' announced by the State government, Shivakumar said, "This is the guarantee check of the Congress party.]

I spoke to the people of the district and they are grateful to the five guarantee schemes of the Congress government," he said.

"Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi have announced 25 guarantee schemes under 5 Nyay schemes if Congress party comes to power in the Centre. These promises will make your life better and it will be delivered promptly. A woman of the house will get Rs 1 lakh per year on the lines of Gruha Lakshmi scheme. Youth will get a stipend of Rs 1 lakh per year. MGNREGA workers will get wage of Rs 400 per day. Farmers will get MSP, loan waiver and insurance of Rs 25 lakh. Congress party will provide social security to all the people," he said.

Addressing BJP's ticket distribution strategy, Shivakumar said, "The BJP's decision not to field half of its incumbent MPs from the State showcases their apprehension. BJP will struggle to secure even 200 seats nationally. A Congress government at the Centre will usher in widespread prosperity." "We have started the campaign by offering prayers to Lord Ganesha at Kurudumale. We have walked the talk in the previous election." he added.

—Salar News

NIRMALA SPEAKS

'Worried about City water issues'

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with BJP State President BY Vijayendra addressing a press meet in Bengaluru on Saturday. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday hit out at the Siddaramaiah government over the water crisis in Bengaluru and alleged that many irrigation and water-related projects and initiatives were halted by the Congress when it came to power in Karnataka last year.

She also criticised the Congress government for the deteriorating law and order in the State. Addressing a press conference here, the Union Minister said it is worrying and sad the City suffers from water-related problems. "Just water not being available is a problem. Since yesterday (Friday), reports of cholera possibly spreading in the town emerged; this is also a big concern...It is sort of a worry but I think it is also somewhat because people don't have enough water available, contaminated water also reaches people and as a result, they are put to difficulties," she said.

Blaming the State government for halting irrigation and water-related projects, Sitharaman said various steps that have been taken till recently or the initiatives which were halted by the current government in Karnataka also showed that there has been mismanagement in water-related areas.

She alleged that in May 2023, the Chief Minister halted tenders worth Rs 20,000 crore for projects including the Visveswaraya Jala Nigam Limited, Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited, Cauvery Neeravari Nigama Limited and Krishna Bhagya Jala Nigam Limited. She also wondered why the Central government's 'Jal Jeevan Mission' was not being encouraged in the State. "For a City like Bengaluru which is cosmopolitan and a global City, we have just hurt ourselves by these kinds of knee-jerk steps for whatever reasons the Karnataka government has taken," she said.

"When pro-Pakistan slogans are raised in the Karnataka Assembly, there is implicit support which is being extended," Sitharaman alleged.

She cited the Rameshwaram Cafe blast in Bengaluru and said: "While NIA is constantly putting out reports that the search is intensified, incidents like the raising of pro-Pakistan slogans in the Assembly showed that a false sense of protection is being extended to people who perpetrate violence." *—PTI*

Congress Bengaluru Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan interacts with the members of Indira Nagar Residents' Association in Bengaluru on Saturday. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

BJP won't win even 200 seats in LS polls: Priyank

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge on Saturday claimed BJP, according to an internal survey of RSS, will not win even 200 seats in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls and won't cross even eight seats in the State.

Accusing Union Home Minister Amit Shah of "lying", for his recent statement alleging delay on the part of the State government in submission of a proposal to the Centre seeking drought relief, he said Shah should have been the "Minister of misinformation".

"RSS' internal survey says they (BJP) won't get even 200 seats. RSS is saying it. In the State, they won't cross even eight seats. How will they win, in fourteen to fifteen seats there is internal fighting (in BJP)," Kharge claimed.

He said several senior BJP leaders are even speaking about the need to cleanse the party.

"They (some BJP leaders) are saying BJP (in the State) is polluted because of one family. They are saying they want to reinstall the original BJP. Are we (Congress) saying it? No, they (BJP) are saying it. They are also claiming that injustice is happening to Hindutva leaders in BJP like - Basangouda Patil Yatnal, CT Ravi, Ananthkumar Hegde, and Eshwarappa.

They are fighting themselves, Congress did not create it," he added.

BJP is aiming to win 370 seats in the country and more than 400 for NDA as a whole in the upcoming Parliamentary elections. In the state, the BJP is targeting to win all 28 Lok Sabha seats.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Kamal Nath's aide, former Congress minister joins BJP

BHOPAL, 6 APRIL

Former Madhya Pradesh minister and four-time Congress MLA from Chhindwara Dipak Saxena and his supporters joined BJP on Friday night. Saxena, who quit Congress on 22 March, said he was joining BJP as he was influenced by the works of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, CM Yadav and state BJP chief VD Sharma. Earlier, his son Ajay Saxena had joined BJP. "Congress has become aimless under Kamal Nath's son Nakul Nath, sitting MP from Chhindwara. My father was being marginalised and the workers too were being ignored in Chhindwara for the last six years. That is why my father took the decision to part ways with the Congress," Ajay Saxena said. *—PTI*

Cong announces candidates for North, South Goa

PANAJI, 6 APRIL

Congress on Saturday announced the names of former Union minister Ramakant Khalap and Viriato Fernandes as its candidates for the North and South Goa Lok Sabha seats. Khalap, 76, was elected as an MP on the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP) ticket from North Goa from 1996-1998. He was the Union Minister of state for Law in late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet. He later left MGP to join Congress. Fernandes, Congress's candidate from South Goa, is an ex-Indian Navy officer. He unsuccessfully contested the 2022 Goa legislative assembly elections from the Dabolim constituency. Lok Sabha polls in Goa will be held in a single phase on 7 May, and the counting of votes will be held on 4 June. *—PTI*

Permission for AAP event denied with rude language

KAITHAL, 6 APRIL

AAP has alleged that its application seeking permission for two poll programmes from the authorities concerned were denied with abusive language in the reply. Taking strong cognisance of the matter, Brahm Prakash, the sub-divisional magistrate-cum-assistant returning officer in Haryana's Kaithal, ordered the suspension of five computer operators and directed police to conduct a thorough probe. Sushil Gupta, Haryana unit chief of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) who is contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha election from the Kurukshetra constituency, said the party had sought permission for two poll programmes on 7 April. AAP said they had applied for the permission for the programmes on the designated portal. *—PTI*

YSRCP MLA quits to join Congress

KADAPA, 6 APRIL

Puthalapattu MLA MS Babu quit the ruling YSRCP on Saturday to join Congress in the presence of Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president YS Sharmila. Meanwhile, Sharmila is continuing her election tour in Kadapa district. She visited Ameen Peer dargha in Kadapa town today and offered special prayers. She alleged that the YSRCP chief and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy did not open his mouth when there were riots in Godhra in Gujarat, adding that he made many promises to Muslims but forgot them. Sharmila, who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Kadapa constituency, taking on her cousin and YSRCP candidate YS Avinash Reddy, promised that she will be available to the people of the district and perform like her father Rajasekhar Reddy. *—PTI*

PM tearing apart democracy: Congress

In rally, Sonia Gandhi calls Modi dictator

JAIPUR, 6 APRIL

Congress on Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of tearing apart the country's dignity and democracy and claimed that various tactics were being used to force Opposition leaders to join BJP.

Addressing an election event of the party, Sonia Gandhi claimed that for the last 10 years, the country has been in the hands of a government that left no stone unturned to promote unemployment, inflation, economic crisis and inequality. "Today our country's democracy is in danger. Democratic institutions are being destroyed and a conspiracy is being hatched to change our Constitution," she alleged, adding, "This is a dictatorship and we all will give a reply to this. Considering himself great, Modi ji is tearing apart the dignity of the country and its democracy. Fear is being installed in the entire system" the former Congress chief said.

Sonia Gandhi also alleged that various tactics were being used to intimidate Opposition leaders and force them to join BJP. In his address at the event, Congress president

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with party leaders Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Ashok Gehlot in Jaipur on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Mallikarjun Kharge described Modi as a "leader of liars" and sought to know what steps he has taken to fulfil the guarantees given by him earlier.

He questioned the country's foreign policy under BJP government and claimed that China encroaching on Indian land and changing the names of Indian villages but PM Modi was not talking about it.

Referring to the prime minister's public address in Churu on Friday, Kharge said Modi talked about Article 370 abrogation at a place where he should have talked about the works he did for farmers.

Priyanka Gandhi claimed that BJP government was favouring a few industrialists and handing over the properties of the nation to them. However, many industrialists create jobs and favouring a few industrialists was an injustice to others, she claimed.

Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot, Congress' state unit chief Govind Singh Dotasra and former deputy CM Sachin Pilot also addressed the programme. *—PTI*

PM takes a jibe at Congress' manifesto

He says manifesto imprint of Muslim League

SAHARANPUR, 6 APRIL

Mounting a strong attack on Congress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that Opposition party is cut off from the hopes and aspirations of today's India and its manifesto reflects the thinking that Muslim League had during the freedom movement.

In his first reaction to Congress manifesto released yesterday, Modi said it "completely bears the imprint of the Muslim League" and the remaining part is dominated by the Leftists.

Addressing an election rally in Saharanpur, Modi said people of the country feel that Congress which fought for the country's independence was finished decades back.

'Let's see how much you will oppose Ram Navami celebrations' Modi alleged that Congress opposed the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya due to its "anger" towards Lord Ram. Modi said, "Opposing the visit to the consecration of Ram temple? Is it appropriate? Not only this, if someone visited, he was expelled from the Congress party for six years. Can this happen in this country, can you imagine the country without Lord Ram?"

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting, ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Saharanpur on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

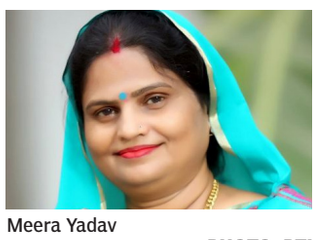
"So much anger for Lord Ram, I am unable to fathom... Lord Ram has got a permanent abode. Ram Navami is coming and people are going to celebrate. Let's see how much you will oppose it," Modi said.

'Law against triple talaq benefited Muslim families'

Modi said Muslim women will bless him for centuries to come as he has removed the "sword" of triple talaq hanging over them and their families. Addressing an election rally in Saharanpur, Modi reached out to the Muslim community, which has a sizeable population in the Lok Sabha constituencies of western Uttar Pradesh, saying real secularism is when all get the benefit of government welfare schemes irrespective of their caste and religion as has been seen during BJP rule.

Around 15.34 crore people are eligible to vote in Uttar Pradesh - a politically crucial state with 80 Lok Sabha seats where the elections will be held in seven phases beginning 19 April. *—ANI/PTI*

Anupam Rajan **PHOTO: X/@ANUPAMRAJAN9**



Meera Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

Nomination of INDIA's MP SP candidate rejected

BHOPAL, 6 APRIL

The nomination forms of 93 candidates were found to be valid, while 16 were rejected during the scrutiny of papers for the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh, poll officials said on Saturday.

These 16 rejected nominations include that of Opposition INDIA bloc nominee and Samajwadi Party's (SP) Khajuraho candidate Meera Yadav. Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Anupam Rajan said candidates are allowed to withdraw their forms till 8 April.

Seven seats – Tikamgarh (SC), Damoh, Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa, Hoshangabad and Betul (ST) – will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. However, the nomination paper of SP candidate Meera Yadav was rejected. The development left the SP fuming, with its chief Akhilesh Yadav terming it a "blatant murder" of democracy and demanding a judicial probe.

After scrutiny, 14 contestants are now left in Khajuraho constituency.

BJP has renominated sitting MPs from Satna (Ganesh Singh), Rewa (Janardan Mishra) and Betul (Durgadas Uikey) and fielded new faces from Hoshangabad (Darshan Singh) and Damoh (Rahul Lodhi). Congress has fielded sitting MLA Siddharth Kushwaha from Satna, former MLA Neelam Mishra from Rewa, Ramu Tekam from Betul, ex-MLA Sanjay Sharma from Hoshangabad and former legislator Tarwar Singh Lodhi from Damoh. *—PTI*

Kavitha moves court against CBI plea to quiz her in Tihar

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

BRS leader K Kavitha, arrested in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case, moved a court here on Saturday opposing a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) plea that sought her interrogation in Tihar jail in a corruption case related to the alleged scam.

The court on Friday allowed CBI to quiz Kavitha in Tihar. The order was passed on the plea filed by the CBI seeking the court's permission to interrogate Kavitha in judicial custody.

Advocate Nitesh Rana, appearing for Kavitha, told the court that CBI thwarted the due process of law by filing the plea "behind her back".

The court is likely to hear her plea later in on Saturday.

Kavitha was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam on 15 March. On Thursday, Telangana MLC urged the court to give her interim bail on account of her 16-year-old son's exams for which he needed his mother's "moral and emotional support".

Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, has been accused of being a key member of the "South Group", which allegedly paid the ruling AAP in Delhi kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for a big share of liquor licences in the national capital. She was sent to 14-day judicial custody last Tuesday.

ED arrested Kavitha, 46, from her Banjara Hills residence in Hyderabad on 15 March. *—PTI*

Sisodia's custody extended

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

A court here on Saturday extended the judicial custody of Aam Aadmi Party leader Manish Sisodia till 18 April in a money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. His party colleague Sanjay Singh, a co-accused who was recently granted bail by Supreme Court in the case, also appeared before the court for the proceedings. Central Bureau of Investigation as well as Enforcement Directorate have alleged that irregularities were committed while modifying the Delhi Excise Policy, undue favours were extended to licence holders, licence fee was waived and licences were extended. The beneficiaries allegedly diverted "illegal" gains to the officials and made false entries in their books of account to evade detection. *—PTI*

CONGRESS MANIFESTO

Kerala CM questions Cong for silence on CAA

ALAPPUZHA, 6 APRIL

In a sharp attack on the Congress, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that the CPI (M) manifesto pledges to repeal the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, whereas the Congress manifesto, lacking a commitment, remains notably silent on the issue.

He also said that the BJP is not even going to win one seat in Kerala in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Vijayan said that Congress failed to raise protests when the Centre abrogated Article 370 and alleged that Congress is willing to compromise its values for votes.

Addressing a press conference in Alappuzha, Vijayan said, "Article 370, which gives

Pinarayi Vijayan **PHOTO: PTI**

special status to Jammu and Kashmir, was abrogated by the BJP government in one day. It was removed without following any procedures. Congress failed to raise protests against this, inside and outside the Parliament."

"We have consistently maintained our political stance and principles, unlike the Congress, which seems willing to compromise its values for votes..," he said. "BJP is not going to win even one out of the 20 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections...".."The CPM manifesto vows to revoke draconian laws like (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) (UAPA) and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act) (PMLA), but a commitment is absent in the Congress manifesto. While Congress makes minor allusions to investigative agencies, its stance appears less forceful."

"Through such a manifesto, Congress has taken the stand of deceiving the common people and minorities of the country," he said.Kerala, one of the few states where the Congress still has a strong presence, sends 20 parliamentarians to the Lok Sabha. *—PTI*

Eknath Shinde's son to contest from Kalyan seat

NAGPUR, 6 APRIL

Shrikant Shinde, son of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, will be 'Mahayuti' candidate from the Kalyan Lok Sabha seat, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Saturday.

Shrikant will face off against Shiv Sena (UBT) candidate Vaishali Darekar-Rane, a former MNS leader. Fadnavis' announcement comes at a time when a section of BJP in Kalyan has expressed reservations against fielding Shrikant the sitting MP from Shiv Sena.

Simmering tensions between cadres of Shiv Sena led by Shinde and the BJP took a violent turn earlier this year when BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad shot at and injured a local leader of Sena in Kalyan over a land dispute. *—PTI*

Congress' Singhvi moves HC against RS poll defeat

SHIMLA, 6 APRIL

Weeks after he lost the Rajya Sabha election from Himachal Pradesh, Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi on Saturday filed an application in the High Court challenging the interpretation of draw of lots rules by the election officer after there was a tie in the poll.

BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan won the 27 February election through draw of lots after both candidates secured 34 votes each. "There is nothing in the law, neither in the act nor in the rules which compels an interpretation which requires that the person whose name is drawn in the draw of lots is a loser," Singhvi told reporters after filing his petition in the Himachal Pradesh High Court.

Congress had a strength of 40

Abhishek Manu Singhvi **PHOTO: PTI**

members and the support of three Independents in the assembly, but both the candidates polled 34 votes each as nine legislators -- six Congress rebels and three Independents -- voted in favour of BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan.

The winner was announced by a draw of lots and under the procedure followed by the election officer, the person whose name was drawn in the draw of lots was declared the loser. *—PTI*

'Poll guarantees yet to be implemented in T'gana'

HYDERABAD, 6 APRIL

- Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy is not focused on implementation of promises but on encouraging defections from other parties into Congress, he alleged

Ahead of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's rally on Saturday, Union Minister G Kishan Reddy attacked the ruling party in Telangana, saying the state government has not implemented its six polls 'guarantees' in 100 days as promised.

Kishan Reddy, BJP president in Telangana, was speaking at the BJP foundation day event held at its state headquarters here.

"Congress has made promises to people but they are not being implemented. I am asking Congress and Rahul Gandhi. You made promises to Telangana people in the run-up to the Assembly elections in the name of six 'guarantees'. You said you will implement them in 100 days. Today, Rahul Gandhi should say how he is coming to Telangana soil (when promises are not implemented)," Kishan Reddy said.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy is not focused on implementation of promises but on encouraging defections from other parties into Congress, he alleged. He said 'phir ek bar Modi sarkar' (Modi government again) is no longer a BJP slogan but the slogan of every household all over the country, he said. *—PTI*

NEWSCLICK ROW

Oppn leaders back Purkayastha

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

Opposition leaders and activists on Saturday expressed solidarity with Newsclick founder Prabir Purkayastha and accused the ruling BJP of crushing dissent.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, party leader Brinda Karat, CPI general secretary D Raja, AAP leader Gopal Rai, former IAS officer and activist Harsh Mander, and senior journalist P Sainath were among those who expressed solidarity with Purkayastha, who was arrested in October 2023, following raids on Newsclick.

Yechury said that his friendship with Purkayastha goes back to his days in the Jawaharlal Nehru University

PHOTO: PTI

(JNU) and recalled he was also arrested during an emergency. Yechury said arrests are being made without evidences, adding that the account of Thrissur unit of CPI(M) was frozen on the eve of the election. AAP leader Gopal Rai also slammed the Union government for trying to crush dissent and the opposition for raising people's voice.

Escalating his attack on the ruling BJP, Rai said, "Elected Delhi CM is in jail, there is no evidence, no facts, Modi was saying I want to finish corruption... If someone is saving the corrupt in this country it's the BJP."

Meanwhile, CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat said that Purkayastha, 75, has asthma and suffered lung infection four times recently.

Veteran journalist and activist P Sainath said Purkayastha was targeted for being a rationalist. Sainath named journalists like Narendra Dabholkar, MM Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh who were assassinated, and said, "Being a rationalist was Prabir's crime". *—PTI*

JP Nadda, others take oath as RS members

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

BJP national president JP Nadda and five other newly-elected members of Rajya Sabha took oath on Saturday. The oath was administered by Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar.

Among others who also took oath include Ashokrao Shankarrao Chavan (Maharashtra), Chunnilal Garasiya (Rajasthan), Anil Kumar Yadav Mandadi (Telangana), Sushmita Dev and Mohammad Nadimul Haque (both West Bengal). His office also said that the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, also administered oath to the elected members of the Rajya Sabha in Parliament House. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

3 killed, 26 injured as bus carrying jawans hits car

SEONI, 6 APRIL

Three people were killed and 26 others injured when a bus carrying Special Armed Forces (SAF) jawans collided with a car in Madhya Pradesh's Seoni district early on Saturday, police said. One of the jawans sustained serious injuries and has been referred to Nagpur in neighbouring Maharashtra, an official said. he accident occurred around am near Dhanagadha village on the Seoni-Mandla State Highway, some 50km from the district headquarters.A bus carrying personnel from the state police's 35th Battalion of SAF from Mandla to Pandhurna (Chhindwara) collided with a car with five occupants including its driver, Keolari police station in-charge Chain Singh Uikey told PTI. Kanhaiya Jaswani,75, Niklesh Jaswani,45, and driver Purushottam Mahobia,37, who were travelling in the car were killed in the accident, he said. *—PTI*

Migrant worker lynched in Kerala, 10 held

KOCHI, 6 APRIL

Ten people were arrested in a case of suspected mob lynching in Kerala's Muvattupuzha where a migrant worker was allegedly beaten to death two days ago. The deceased was identified as Asok Das, a 24-year-old man hailing from Arunachal Pradesh, police said. Das, who came to the southern state in search of a job, had been staying in a rented house in Valakam in nearby Muvattupuzha for some time. According to FIR, the victim was tied to a pole and interrogated by a group of locals when he had gone to visit his female friend residing in the same area on Thursday evening. Later, He died on Friday while undergoing treatment, the FIR added.*—PTI*

Class 8 student beaten, stick inserted in privates

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

A 14-year-old boy was beaten up and a wooden stick was inserted in his private parts allegedly by his classmate in a school, triggering protests in East Delhi, police said on Saturday.The accused has been apprehended and produced in the Juvenile Justice Board, police said adding the victim's family suspects more students might have been involved in the assault. Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Apoorva Gupta said the incident occurred on 2 April on the premises of a private school. The victim, a student of class eight, allegedly got into a fight with the accused over some issues. Following the incident, the parents and relatives of the victim held protests outside the school demanding action. The victim was counselled and legal action has been initiated, police said.*—PTI*

3 Naxalites killed near Telangana border

RAIPUR, 6 APRIL

Security forces gunned down three Naxalites in an encounter in a dense forest in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district bordering Telangana on Saturday and recovered arms and ammunition from the scene, a senior police official here said. The exchange of fire took place around 5.30am near Dolliguda village under the Usoor police station area along the interstate border when a team of Greyhounds, Telangana's elite anti-Naxal force, was out on an operation, he said. A team of Chhattisgarh police was also present in the area to extend auxiliary support to the Greyhounds team, he said. A search operation is still underway in the area, he added.*—PTI*

Border march cancelled after Sec 144 in Ladakh

Ladakh admin banned rallies on Sunday, reduced net speed

LEH, 6 APRIL

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) Saturday withdrew their proposed march to the Changthang border with China on 7 April, saying it is doing so in the interest of people even as it accused the administration of turning Leh into a "war zone".

The LAB said they have already achieved their objective of creating awareness among the people of the country about the plight of farmers. They said the farmers are losing prime pasture land to huge industrial plants in the south and "Chinese encroachments" in the north.

They said they will continue their peaceful peaceful agitation in support of their various demands, especially statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the sixth schedule of the Constitution.

Previously, with the Ladakh administration imposing prohibitory orders banning rallies on Sunday and a 24-hour reduction in internet speed, the Leh-based Apex Body said it has no intention of violating laws and hoped it will be allowed to carry out its proposed 'border march'.

In a separate order, Additional Director General of Police of Ladakh SD Singh Jamwal ordered the scaling down of internet speed and mobile data services of 3G, 4G and 5G connections and public 5G Wi-Fi facilities to 2G within a 10-kilometre radius of Leh city from 6pm on 6 April for 24 hours.

The DM of Leh, in another order, prohibited the posting or sharing such messages that have the potential to disturb communal harmony, peace and tranquillity and may lead to a law-and-order situation in the district.

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) termed the restrictions ahead of its proposed border march an "overreaction" by the administration and said it has no intention of violating the law.

"We have been holding a chain hunger strike for the past 31 days and we feel such a reaction is the result of some misunderstanding," climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, flanked by LAB leader Chering Dorjay, told reporters here.

Wangchuk, who held a hunger strike for 21 days till 26 March, said they strongly believe in peace and peaceful ways to highlight their demands, including those connected with the prevailing condition of the Pashmina grazers.

"If they stop us from marching ahead, it shows the government has something to hide and they do not want the real picture to reach the outside world... we are hopeful that the administration will allow our peaceful march if they have nothing to hide," he said. *—PTI*

Sonam Wangchuk said they strongly believe in peaceful ways to highlight their demands PHOTO: X/ @Wangchuk66

- They said they will continue their peaceful peaceful agitation in support of their various demands, especially statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the sixth schedule of the Constitution

CJI SAYS

'Lawyers must put Constitution over political beliefs'

NAGPUR, 6 APRIL

The judiciary has broad shoulders and can take praise as well as criticism in its stride, but the recent tendency of lawyers to comment on pending cases or judgments is very disturbing, Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud has said.

Office-bearers and members of the bar should not forget while reacting to judicial decisions that they are officers of the court and not laypersons, he said.

The judiciary has time and again risen to the occasion to assert its independence and non-partisanship, Justice Chandrachud said.

The bar as an institution is essential to preserve judicial independence, constitutional values and dignity of the court, the CJI added.

"To quote Aristotle, human beings are political animals. Lawyers are no exception. However, for members of the bar, one's highest interest must not lie with partisan interests but with the court and the Constitution," he said.

The CJI said judgments of the Supreme Court's constitutional benches are the culmination of rigorous proceedings, thorough legal analysis and commitment to constitutional principles.

"Of late, I have been very disturbed by the tendency of members of bar associations to comment on cases which are pending and on judgments. You are first and foremost officers of the court, and the truth and dignity of our legal discourse is in your hands," the CJI said.

India's Constitution is an inclusive constitution intended to bring together every person including "the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker" (people from diverse backgrounds), he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

17 Indians lured into illegal work in Laos return home, says EAM

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

As many as 17 Indian workers, who were lured into unsafe and illegal work in Laos, are on their way back home, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

He also complimented the Indian embassy in Laos for its successful efforts in the case.

In a post on X, he said, "Modi ki Guarantee works for all at home and abroad. Seventeen Indian workers, lured into unsafe and illegal work in Laos, are on their way back home."

"Well done, @IndianEmbLaos. Thank Lao authorities for their support for the safe repatriation," he added.

The external affairs ministry on Thursday cautioned Indian nationals against falling prey to human traffickers promising lucrative job opportunities in Cambodia.

In an advisory, the ministry called upon Indians looking at job opportunities in the southeast Asian country to thoroughly check the background of the prospective employer.

"It has come to attention that Indian nationals, lured by fake promises of lucrative job opportunities in Cambodia, are falling into the trap of human traffickers," it said.

The ministry said these Indian nationals are "coerced" to undertake online financial scams and other illegal activities."Indian nationals intending to visit Cambodia for employment are cautioned to do so only through authorised agents. It is also advised that the background of the prospective employer in Cambodia is checked thoroughly," it said. *—PTI*

The External Affairs Ministry cautioned Indian nationals against falling prey to traffickers promising lucrative job in Cambodia PHOTO: PTI

GAGAN SHAKTI 2024

An aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) during the emergency landing and take-off drills on Agra-Lucknow Expressway as part of 'Gagan Shakti 2024' exercise PHOTO: PTI

4 ARRESTED IN KERALA'S KANNUR BLAST

KANNUR, 6 APRIL

Four people were arrested on Saturday in connection with the blast near Panur here a day ago that claimed one life and caused injuries to three others, police said.

Police said that the arrested accused, the three injured people and the one who died, all of them were CPI(M) workers or supporters, a claim that has been denied by the Left party.

A senior officer of Panur police station said that they have arrested Shebin Lal,

K Atul, KK Arun and Sayooj all of whom were allegedly present when the country-made bomb being made had exploded.

Sayooj was caught from Palakkad while allegedly trying to escape to Coimbatore in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, police said.

Three others -- Vineesh, Vinod and Ashwanth -- who were also injured in the blast are undergoing treatment, it added.

CPI(M) state secretary MV Govindan said that the party has no connection with those involved in the incident as they had attacked party members in the past.

He said there was no need for the party to make weapons during the election time and such allegations against the CPI(M) were false propaganda.

Govindan was apparently referring to the Congress-led UDF allegations that the bomb was being made by CPI(M) workers to disrupt the election process.

The blast on Friday in this north Kerala district had stirred up the political waters in the state. *—PTI*

Woman's consent can't be on misconceptions: HC

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

When a woman makes a reasoned choice to establish physical relations, consent cannot be said to be based on misconception unless there is clear evidence of a false promise of marriage, the Delhi High Court has said.

Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta made the observation while quashing a rape case against a man after noting that the matter has been amicably settled between him and the woman and they have now got married to each other.

The woman had lodged a rape case against the man alleging that he repeatedly established physical relations with her on the pretext of marriage but later refused to tie the knot saying that his family has fixed his marriage with someone else.

The court was subsequently informed that the man and the complainant settled their dispute and got married in court.

The complainant told the High Court that she has been living happily with the man and did not wish to proceed with the First Information Report (FIR) which was registered under "misconception" since the accused was reluctant to marry due to resistance from his family. It added that while the investigation was in progress, the man voluntarily married the woman and so it cannot be construed that the promise made by him initially was with an intention to not fulfil it.

It cannot be ignored that quashing of proceedings shall result in better harmony in the matrimonial relationship between the parties, rather than continuing with the proceedings under Section 376 (punishment for rape) of the IPC, the court said, adding the chances of conviction after trial were remote and bleak in view of the settlement between the couple. *—PTI*

CBI busts child trafficking ring in Delhi, two newborns rescued

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

The CBI has busted a child trafficking ring in the national capital and rescued two newborns, officials said on Saturday.

On receiving information about the child trafficking ring, officials of the federal probe agency conducted searches at multiple locations in Delhi and Haryana on Friday evening.

During the raid, the two infants were found at a location in Keshavpuram.

A woman who sold the infants and the man who bought them have been detained and were being questioned, officials of the probe agency said. Other suspects of the child trafficking ring were also being interrogated, they added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Punjab woman paraded semi-naked; 4 held

TARN TARAN, 6 APRIL

A 55-year-old woman was assaulted and paraded semi-naked in Valtoha village here allegedly by her son's in-laws after he got married against the wishes of the bride's parents, police said on Saturday.

Four people of the five booked over the incident were arrested on Saturday, Station House Officer Sunita Bawa said.The incident occurred on 31 March, a few days after the victim's son eloped with a woman and married her against her family's wishes, police said.

According to the complaint filed by the victim, she was alone at her home when her son's in-laws allegedly assaulted her and tore off her clothes.

Five people have been booked in the case and three of them have been identified as Kulwinder Kaur Mani, Sharanjit Singh Shanni and Gurcharan Singh, police said.

Based on the complaint, a First Information Report (FIR) was registered on 3 April under the Indian Penal Code sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354B (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe), 354D (stalking), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 149 (unlawful assembly). *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

- The incident occurred on 31 March, a few days after the victim's son eloped with a woman and married her against her family's wishes, police said

TECH ENABLED CURE

AI helping people reverse diabetes

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

An artificial intelligence-powered diabetes management programme aimed at empowering people in making informed decisions to reverse chronic metabolic diseases, especially during fasts, has received endorsements from experts who have termed it revolutionary.

TWIN Health's Whole Body Digital Twin technology uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to create a "digital twin" of a person's unique metabolism, offering precise nutrition guidance with tailored meal plans for optimal blood sugar control during religious fastings.

According to experts, the technology has been scientifically validated to provide personalised and precise guidance in nutrition, sleep, activity, and breathing to manage and reverse chronic metabolic diseases.

Dr Mohsin Wali, Senior Consultant at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi, said, "The potential of the Whole Body Digital Twin in managing diabetes during religious fastings is truly revolutionary."

"The personalised approach and data-driven insights offered by TWIN Health's solution have the power to transform the lives of individuals with diabetes, especially during the fasting period, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health," he said.

Dr Shashank Joshi, a Mumbai-based endocrinologist and Chief Scientist at Twin Health said research and clinical outcomes demonstrate that the technology has the potential to facilitate diabetes remission and support individuals, especially during Ramadan, in safely reducing or eliminating medication usage.

"This has a profound impact on the overall health and well-being," the doctor said, adding that personalised sleep recommendations, adjusted exercise routines, and stress management techniques further enhance metabolic health.

People can access Twin Health by signing up for an account on its website, completing an initial health assessment, and using the platform's various tools and features to improve their overall health and lifestyle, Dr Joshi added. *—PTI*

Artificial intelligence-powered diabetes management programme aims at empowering people to overcome chronic illness PHOTO: PTI

- According to experts, the technology has been scientifically validated to provide personalised and precise guidance in nutrition, sleep, activity

PROTEST MARCH

Mahila Congress activists during a protest demanding the resignation of Kerala Health Minister Veena George over the ICU sexual assault case, in Thiruvananthapuram, on Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

Campaigning at night: Politics active in sleepy Lakshadweep

In the serene tranquility of Agatti Island, nestled within the Lakshadweep Archipelago, the night had long fallen.

Yet, far from the silence one might expect, the air crackled with fervour as a group of enthusiastic workers from the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar), staunch supporters of their candidate, sitting MP Mohammed Faisal PP, traversed the island's lanes.

Clutching a model Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), they embarked on a nocturnal campaign, knocking on doors, and spreading their message of support.

In the month of Ramadan, life starts to wake up on these sleepy islands of Lakshadweep only after the fast breaks. The activities peak after 10pm, after the night prayers in the mosque.

In the smallest parliamentary constituency in terms of electorate size, residents of Lakshadweep, dominated by Muslims, emerge for their daily activities on the streets and beaches after 10 pm during Ramadan.

This night time window becomes crucial for political parties, as it offers the only opportunity for campaigning ahead of the upcoming general election.

Despite the late hour, all workers of NCP(S) were brimming with energy as they cheered enthusiastically for their leader, 'Moothon', as Faisal is affectionately referred to here. They kept shouting "Piranna Manninu Vendi" (For the Motherland), while displaying his posters and notices.

They believe that if the INDIA bloc fails to capture power at the Centre, they need Faisal to raise his voice for the people of the islands.

The voters on the island, who know each other well, were receptive to the party workers' messages. Some of them engaged in conversations with the Congress candidate, Hamdullah Sayeed, who arrived there on a two-wheeler.

The polls in Lakshadweep are scheduled on 19 April
PHOTO: PIXABAY

As Sayeed passed through the lanes, one of Faisal's enthusiastic supporters booed at him, but Sayeed happily waved his hand in response. Immediately, a senior NCP(S) worker stopped the youth who booed, issuing a stern warning against behaving inappropriately.

"We should never drop our decency," the elderly warned him.

The polls are scheduled in the Lakshadweep constituency in the first phase, which is on 19 April.

There are 55 polling booths spread across 10 human inhabited islands in the archipelago and a total of 57,594 voters for the 2024 elections.

He is also the son of the late PM Sayeed, who held the record for being the longest-serving MP of Lakshadweep. "By the time we connect with these voters, exhaustion sets in," he told PTI.

The unique topography of the Lakshadweep Islands, along with its troubling connectivity issues, compounds the challenges faced by the candidates.

"Now we have hired a boat on our own to reach other islands. It is very expensive, but we have no other option, Sayeed said.

Considering all these difficulties, the two rival candidates had started their campaign much ahead of the election notification, as there was no confusion in naming the candidates.

Sayeed, sporting a greasing beard and modest-looking attire, alleged that the two-time MP of this constituency has failed miserably to fight for the cause of the people of Lakshadweep.

He said it was imperative for the INDIA bloc to come to power at the Centre, and his victory would strengthen that shift in government for the benefit of Lakshadweep.

He said the "anti-secular party" ruling the Centre might have problems with the islands having a 100 per cent Muslim population.

The islanders have been experiencing connectivity issues, particularly over the last few years. There are no regular vessels connecting the islands in Lakshadweep. Some islands have a ship connecting them to others only once a week or so.

"When UPA was in power, we had 10 vessels connecting the mainland with the islands. It means each island had at least one ship daily. Now we have only one ship from the mainland," Sayeed said.

Faisal, who is campaigning in Androth, is confident of retaining his seat. "This is not just an election but the fight for our existence. We are all supportive of development, but not at the cost of people's lives or the culture of the islanders. We need to throw the NDA out of power," Faisal said.

He said the voters have confidence in him to let him continue the good work that he has done for the last two terms as an MP.

—PTI

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Extreme heat affects Indian women more than men

A new study has revealed a troubling gender disparity in India when it comes to coping with extreme heat. Women, according to the analysis, are significantly more vulnerable to extreme temperature conditions compared to men.

Since 2005, data shows a concerning rise in heat-related deaths among women in India, said the analysis published in Significance Magazine, a journal by Royal Statistical Society.

"We find through descriptive statistical analysis that publicly available data for India shows that females exhibit a heightened susceptibility to extreme temperature conditions (specifically heat) compared to males," Ramit Debnath, university assistant professor and an academic director at the University of Cambridge, and one of the authors, told Down To Earth.

Debnath and his colleagues initiated the analysis to see if women in India face a higher risk of mortality from extreme temperatures in India. But the country lacks granular (level of detail) and high quality national data on temperature related health and healthcare data.

This, according to the team, is primarily because there is no standardised methodology to report mortality and morbidity (illness) due to temperature change.

They extracted mortality and population data from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD), the largest and most comprehensive effort to quantify health loss across 204 countries, territories and sub-national locations and over time.

The authors point out that while the GBD database provides annual estimates for gender-specific temperature-related mortality rates from 1950 to 2019 in India, the data still lacks granularity.

They also collected data on India's daily temperature data (mean, maximum and minimum) from 1990-2019 recorded by India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Their analysis showed that men showed a gradual decline in deaths with certain spikes linked to temperature, whereas for women, it showed a gradual increase from 2005.

The percentage relative change in mortality rates decreased by 23.11 per cent for men from 2000 to 2010, and 18.7 per cent from 2010 to 2019.

For women, the percentage change in mortality rate increased by 4.63 per cent in 2000 to 2010 and 9.84 per cent between 2010 and 2019.

Debnath said the team could not identify the reason behind the gradual increase in temperature-related fatalities in women. "But an intuitive reason is increased reporting of female mortality in India," he said.

The decrease is male temperature-related deaths could be possibly explained by advances in public healthcare infrastructure, socioeconomic upliftment and increased access to cooling and heating in the country.

The analysis suggested women exhibit a heightened susceptibility to extreme temperature conditions (specifically heat) compared to men.

The team also compared studies on mortality linked to temperature across the world. The Global North, they point out, shows stronger evidence on women being at higher risk of weather-related mortality. No study has concluded the opposite.

As for the Global South, among the 16 studies that were a part of the analysis, seven studies conclude women are at high risk, six conclude the opposite and three declare no significant difference between the genders.

Among the 16 studies, four were from India. Of them, three found that women face a higher risk and one reported the opposite. Current studies in the Global South present conflicting views on gender-specific mortality rates from temperature changes, the researchers noted in the paper.

Further, most evidence was gathered from sectors like industry, agriculture, or informal daily wage labourers. The authors found no data on the population that mostly stays indoors. In countries like India, women spend 54 per cent more time indoors than men.

Women in the Global South are especially at risk due to rigid cultural norms and societal expectations, which limit their ability to respond and cope effectively to extreme temperature risks.

The available mortality data at an annual scale, the team noted, fails to factor in how fluctuations in temperature immediately affects mortality. It also does not reflect how deaths might be affected by long-term factors such as advances in healthcare or changes in population demographics.

—Downtoearth

Women in the Global South are at risk due to rigid cultural norm
PHOTO: X/ @APPADAPPAJAPPA

Saving Sarah: The last Jewish embroidery shop in Kochi

A chance encounter when he was selling postcards to tourists in Jew Town as a 13-year-old in the early 1980s would change the course of Thaha Ibrahim's life.

Growing up in Mattancherry, a bustling hub of the spice trade in the southern city of Cochin (now Kochi), Thaha Ibrahim had always found the world outside far more captivating than the confines of his classroom.

So when he left school in the sixth grade, his family did not try to stop him. He explored different trades, from assisting his father, a tailor, with stitching clothes to helping his uncle in the spice business. But, mostly, he was drawn to the tourists who arrived in droves on the ships that docked in the port.

Invariably, they would flock to see the centuries-old Paradesi Synagogue in Jew Town, the neighbourhood in Fort Kochi, a busy, touristy waterfront area of Kochi that had once been used by Portuguese, Dutch and British merchants during colonial rule of the city.

Thaha would arrive in the morning in Jew Town, spend the day selling postcards on the street to tourists visiting the synagogue and return home at dusk. He always maintained a respectful distance from others in the Jewish neighbourhood.

That all changed one Sunday in 1982 when, as a ship packed with Western tourists docked, bringing the promise of postcard sales, Thaha faced an unexpected obstacle.

Thaha's first encounter with Jacob's wife, Sarah, at the couple's home the following evening did not go quite as well. The boy had seen Sarah around the neighbourhood before, sometimes buying produce from the vegetable vendors who hung around the same spots he himself did, but he had never spoken to her. She had not yet opened her embroidery shop in the neighbourhood but was known for her sewing skills, stitching clothes for friends and neighbours with the help of three servants who worked for the couple.

Today, Thaha, now 54, recounts his memories of Sarah inside the shop, Sarah's Hand Embroidery, as he stands among its range of Jewish accessories, souvenirs and handicrafts - menorahs, table linen, placemats, towels, kippas and challah covers.

Little did any of them know, however, that this sparky start was just the beginning of a deep bond between Thaha and Sarah, which would survive beyond her life and keep her legacy - Sarah's Hand Embroidery shop, today the last Jewish embroidery shop in Kochi - alive.

A photo of Jacob and Sarah hanged inside their shop
PHOTO: AL JAZEERA

The 'first emporium of India'

Sarah and Thaha's near 40-year bond was one between two unlikely friends - a Muslim boy and an elderly Jewish woman from different social classes.

Kerala's first Jewish settlements date as far back as ancient Israel and the reign of King Solomon, believed to have lasted from 970 to 931 BC. They are linked with trade on southwest India's Malabar Coast, the "first emporium of India".

A second wave of Jewish settlers, Sephardic Jews fleeing Spanish persecution, arrived in Cochin in 1492, journeying via Portugal, Turkey and Baghdad.

These newcomers, known as Paradesi ("foreign") Jews, joined the initial settlers, the Malabari Jews, who had first settled on the Malabar Coast, to form the community of Cochin Jews - now one of the oldest Jewish communities in India.

They spoke Malayalam like the locals and used Judeo-Malayalam, a language that combines Hebrew, Aramaic and Malayalam, in their hymns but strictly adhered to their religious traditions.

'So you know about stitching!'

In the early days of Thaha's friendship with the Cohens, he remembers a busy household with three servants. Jacob, then in his early 70s, was semi-retired and continued working as a private tax consultant. Sarah, in her early 60s, had become the go-to tailor in Jew Town and was a master of traditional Jewish embroidery.

Initially, Thaha served as Jacob's helping hand, using a bicycle to quickly fetch photocopies and other things Jacob needed for his work, while Jacob rewarded him with pocket money. "Whenever I watched cricket through the Cohens' window, he would invite me inside and give me a seat," Thaha recalls of his beloved "Dicky Uncle".

By the 1990s, Jew Town's Jewish population had fallen below 20 while tourism surged along with demand for Sarah's products. She began outsourcing production to local stitching units using her designs with Thaha handling the logistics. "Sarah Aunty used to give me an amount from the profit," Thaha says.

Before he died in 1999, Jacob, facing the reality of his declining health, entrusted Thaha, by now married with children of his own, with a significant request: "Sarah has no one. You must be there for her."

Providing the parochet

The pair's bond had spanned more than 36 years when Sarah died at the end of August 2019 at the age of 96.

She had yearned for a parochet, a long cloth with Jewish inscriptions and designs that is used in synagogues to cover the Torah after it has been used to cover a coffin. The recent war in Gaza has not shaken his belief that bonds of love such as those he shared with the Cohens will endure.

And while Sarah Cohen with her silver-white, bobbed hair, fibre-framed glasses, colourful maxi dress and matching kippa no longer graces the window from which she loved to watch the tourists, her legacy shines on through a Muslim man, Thaha, who insists it is still "Sarah Aunty's shop".

—Al Jazeera

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Soyuz capsule carrying 3 ISS lands in Kazakhstan

MOSCOW, 6 APRIL

A Russian space capsule with two women and one man safely landed in a steppe in Kazakhstan on Saturday after their missions aboard the International Space Station. The Soyuz MS-24 carrying Russia's Oleg Novitsky, NASA's Loral O'Hara and Marina Vasilevskaya of Belarus touched down southeast of the remote town of Dzhezkazgan at 7.17 am. Those remaining at the orbiting outpost are NASA astronauts Michael Barratt, Matthew Dominick, Tracy Dyson and Jeannette Epps as well as Russian cosmonauts Nikolai Chub, Alexander Grebenkin and Oleg Kononenko. O'Hara arrived at the International Space Station on 15 September, 2023, spending a total of 204 days there, NASA said. *—PTI*

Trump to raise $43M at Florida fundraiser

NEW YORK, 6 APRIL

Donald Trump's campaign is expecting to raise more than $40 million on Saturday when major donors gather for his biggest fundraiser yet. The event at the Palm Beach, Florida, home of billionaire investor John Paulson is expected to bring in $43 million for the former president's third run at the White House, according to Paulson. The high-dollar event is expected to include about 100 guests, including more than a few billionaires, and top a new single-event fundraising record set by President Joe Biden, who raised $26 million recently at a gathering with former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. The event, billed as the "Inaugural Leadership Dinner," sends a signal of a resurgence of Trump and the Republican Party's fundraising, which has struggled to catch up to the Democrats. *—AP*

Uyghur in Turkey protest against Chinese oppression

ISTANBUL, 6 APRIL

Uyghur activists and supporters gathered in front of the Chinese Consulate in Sariyer, Istanbul to protest Chinese oppression and religious persecution in East Turkestan. The demonstration marked the 34th anniversary of the Baren revolution, a significant event in Uyghur history. Responding to the call of the International Union of East Turkestan NGOs (IUETO), an estimated 400-500 Uyghur men, women, and children raised their voices against the Chinese regime, denouncing its policies and actions. In a press release delivered at the gathering, IUETO Chairman Hidayet Oguzhan paid homage to the martyrs of the Baren revolution and condemned Chinese authorities for imposing restrictions. *—ANI*

Top police officer, gunman killed in militant attack

PESHAWAR, 6 APRIL

A deputy superintendent of police and his gunman were killed as militants ambushed their vehicle in the restive northwest Pakistan on Saturday. The militants attacked the police vehicle near Manjiwala Chowk, about 190 km southwest from here, in volatile Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing DSP Gul Mohammad Khan and Constable Naseem Gul. Pakistan witnessed as many as 245 incidents of terror attacks and counter-terror operations during the first quarter of 2024, resulting in 432 fatalities and 370 injuries among civilians, security personnel and rebels, according to a report by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS). Individually, KP province suffered 51 per cent and the latter 41 per cent of all fatalities in the first quarter of 2024, the report said. *—PTI*

Iran readies attack on Israel over Syria strike

US braces for a possible retaliation against Israeli or American targets in the region

TEHRAN, 6 APRIL

Iran said it asked the US to "step aside" as the country prepares a response to a suspected Israeli attack on its consulate in Syria while Hezbollah, its main proxy in the Middle East, warned the Jewish state it's prepared for war.

In a written message to Washington, Iran "warned the US not to get dragged into Netanyahu's trap," Mohammad Jamshidi, the Iranian president's deputy chief of staff for political affairs, wrote on X, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The US should "step aside so that you don't get hit."

"In response, the US asked Iran not to hit American targets," Jamshidi said. The US hasn't commented on the alleged message Iran had sent. CNN reported that the US is on high alert and is preparing for a "significant" response from Iran against Israeli or American targets in the region. The network cited an unnamed US official. NBC, citing two unnamed US officials, said President Joe Biden's administration is concerned any attack could be inside Israel, specifically against "military or intelligence targets, rather than civilians."

The Biden administration did take the unusual step of communicating directly to Iran that the US was unaware Monday's strike in Damascus would happen, Bloomberg reported. The Islamic Republic has said it will deliver a "slap" to Israel, its arch enemy. Still, it's unclear when that would happen or whether Iran would try to attack Israel directly or through one of its proxy groups such as Hezbollah, based in Lebanon. The airstrike hit the Iranian consulate in Damascus, killing at least seven Iranians, including two generals. *—Bloomberg*

Iranian mourners gather around a truck carrying the flag-draped coffins of Revolutionary Guard members killed in an airstrike on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

Europe mulls halting arms sales to Israel

LONDON, 6 APRIL

The words coming from some of Israel's closest allies have been startling in their vehemence: "appalled," "outraged," "no more excuses."

The Israeli military's killing of seven aid workers in Gaza has triggered unprecedented criticism from European leaders, who are stepping up calls for a ceasefire and in some cases halting arms sales to Israel as the war's toll mounts.

The attack on the World Central Kitchen convoy has sharpened the dilemma for European politicians, who are squeezed between support for an ally that suffered a terrible attack on 7 October. "Nothing justifies such a tragedy," French Foreign Minister Sébastien Séjourné said after Monday's attack. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was "appalled" by the deaths of the aid workers, three of whom were British.

Britain summoned the Israeli ambassador for a reprimand over the killings. So did Poland, which lost one of its citizens.

Palestinians, aid workers and international rights groups say Western outrage over the deaths of foreign aid workers contrasts with the subdued response to the suffering of Gaza residents.

—PTI

Russian missiles hit Kharkiv, 6 dead and 11 wounded

KYIV, 6 APRIL

Russian forces overnight attacked Ukraine with drones and missiles, killing at least six people and wounding 11 more in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, local officials reported.

Governor of the Kharkiv region Oleh Syniehubov said missile strikes on the city damaged residential buildings, a gas station, a kindergarten, a cafe, a shop and cars.

Overall, Russia fired 32 Iranian-made Shahed drones and six missiles at Ukraine overnight, according to the air force commander. Ukrainian air defence forces shot down three cruise missiles and 28 drones, Lt. Gen. Mykola Oleshchuk said in a statement. "Russian killers continue to terrorize Ukrainians and attack Kharkiv and other peaceful cities," he said.

The Russian military has not commented on the strikes, but said that Ukraine on Saturday morning fired Vampire rockets at Russia. All 10 of them were shot down over Russia's border region of Belgorod by air defence systems, the Russian Defence Ministry said.

People evacuated after dam burst

Floods caused by rising water levels in the Ural River broke a dam in a city near Russia's border with Kazakhstan, forcing some 2,000 people to evacuate, local authorities said.

The dam broke in the city of Orsk in the Orenburg region, less than 20 kilometres north of the border on Friday night, according to Orsk mayor Vasily Kozupitsa.

—AP

Overall, Russia fired 32 Iranian-made Shahed drones and six missiles at Ukraine overnight **PHOTO: X@ ZELENSKAUA**

1 more Indian student dies in US, probe on

NEW YORK, 6 APRIL

An Indian student in the US state of Ohio has died and police are investigating the case, India's diplomatic mission here has said, the latest in a string of tragedies to shock the community in the country.

The Consulate General of India in New York said on Friday that it was "deeply saddened" by the "unfortunate demise" of Uma Satya Sai Gadde in Cleveland, Ohio.

The consulate said that a police investigation into the death is underway, and it continues to remain in touch with the family in India.

Since the beginning of 2024, there have been at least half a dozen deaths of Indian and Indian-origin students in the US. The alarming rise in the number of attacks has caused concern among the community.

Last month, a 34-year-old trained classical dancer from India, Amarnath Ghosh, was shot dead in St Louis, Missouri.

Sameer Kamath, a 23-year-old Indian-American student at Purdue University, was found dead in a nature preserve in Indiana on 5 February.

The series of attacks on Indians and Indian origin persons/students had prompted the officials of the Indian Embassy in Washington and its consulates at various places to hold a virtual interaction with Indian students from across the US, discussing various aspects of student well-being and ways to stay connected with the larger diaspora.

—PTI

The police broke the external doors of the Mexican diplomatic headquarters **PHOTO: X@WORLD AFFAIRS EYE**

Mexico breaks diplomatic ties with Ecuador after police raid embassy

QUITO, 6 APRIL

Mexico's president Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Friday evening the country will break diplomatic ties with Ecuador after police broke into the Mexican embassy in Quito.

The announcement came after Ecuadorian police officers forcibly broke into the Mexican embassy in Quito, detaining former Ecuadorian Vice President Jorge Glas, who was seeking political asylum there, as a diplomatic rift between the two countries deepened. Glas, arguably the most wanted man in Ecuador, faces investigations of corruption, bribery and more.

The police broke the external doors of the Mexican diplomatic headquarters in the Ecuadorian capital and entered the main patio.

> Experts watching the arrest pointed out the act was a bold violation of the Vienna Conventions on Consular Relations, something that is likely to put a firm wedge between the governments of Mexico and Ecuador

"Ecuador is a sovereign nation and we are not going to allow any criminal to stay free," wrote Ecuador's Presidency in a statement Friday night.López Obrador fired back calling Glas' detention an "authoritarian act" and "a flagrant violation of international law and the sovereignty of Mexico."Alicia Bárcena, Mexico's secretary of foreign relations, added that a number of diplomats suffered injuries in the incident and said it violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Experts watching the arrest pointed out the act was a bold violation of the Vienna Conventions on Consular Relations, something that is likely to put a firm wedge between the governments of Mexico and Ecuador."This is not possible, it cannot be, this is crazy," said Roberto Canseco, head of the Mexican consular section in Quito. Asked about the situation of former Vice President Glas and if he was apprehended by public forces, he stated: "I understand that yes, I am very worried because they could kill him; this is totally outside the norm." *—PTI*

US, Japan, Australia, Philippines to stage drills in South China Sea

MANILA, 6 APRIL

The United States, Japan, Australia and the Philippines will hold their first joint naval exercises, including anti-submarine warfare training, in a show of force Sunday in the South China Sea where Beijing's aggressive actions to assert its territorial claims have caused alarm.

The four treaty allies and security partners are holding the exercises to safeguard "the rule of law that is the foundation for a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region" and uphold freedom of navigation and overflight, they said in a joint statement issued by their defence chiefs Saturday.

China was not mentioned by name in the statement, but the four countries reaffirmed their stance that a 2016 international arbitration ruling, which invalidated China's expansive claims on historical grounds, was final and legally binding.China has refused to participate in the arbitration, rejected the ruling and continues to defy it. The Philippines brought its disputes with China to international arbitration in 2013 after a tense sea standoff.

Last year, the Chinese Foreign Ministry warned against military exercises involving the United States and its allies in the disputed waters harming its security and territorial interests.

"We stand with all nations in safeguarding the international order based on the rule of law that is the foundation for a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region," the four nations said but did not provide specific details of the military drills, called the Maritime Cooperative Activity.Japan said in a statement, issued by its embassy in Manila, that it would deploy its destroyer, the JS Akebono, for the South China Sea exercises, which would include anti-submarine warfare training and other military manoeuvres.

—PTI

US and China plan talks on economic growth: Yellen

GUANGZHOU, 6 APRIL

The US and China agreed to hold talks that will address a key American complaint about China's economic model, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on the second day of an official visit to China.

The two sides will hold more talks and create two new economic groups dedicated to growth in domestic and global economies as well as anti-money laundering, according to a US statement about the creation of the groups.

Yellen, who started her five-day visit in one of China's major industrial and export hubs, has focused thus far on what the US considers to be unfair Chinese trade practices in talks with senior Chinese officials.

In her statement, Yellen said she and her counterparts "agreed that the US and China will hold intensive exchanges on balanced growth in the domestic and global economies. These exchanges will facilitate a discussion around macroeconomic imbalances, including their connection to overcapacity, and I intend to use this opportunity to advocate for a level playing field for American workers and firms."

The announcement of the groups come after two days of extended meetings between Yellen and Vice Premier He Lifeng on Friday and Saturday. *—AP*

DEATH TOLL AT 13

600 still stranded in Taiwan, 3 days after earthquake

TAIPEI, 6 APRIL

Rescuers were planning to bring in heavy equipment on Saturday to try to recover two bodies buried under boulders on a hiking trail, three days after Taiwan's strongest earthquake in 25 years.

Four more people remain missing on the same Shakadang Trail in Taroko National Park, famed for its rugged mountainous terrain. Search and recovery work was set to resume, after being called off Friday afternoon because of aftershocks.

At least 13 people were killed by the magnitude 7.4 earthquake that struck on Wednesday morning off Taiwan's east coast, and 10 others were still missing.

More than 600 people, including about 450 at a hotel in the Taroko park, remained stranded in various locations cut off by rockslides and other damage.

Demolition work is underway at a building collapsed by a powerful earthquake in Hualien City, Taiwan on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Survivors have told harrowing tales of rocks tumbling onto roadways, trapping them in tunnels until rescuers arrived to free them. In the city of Hualien, a building left tilting over a street at a precarious angle was being carefully torn down.

The relatively low number of deaths from such a powerful quake has been attributed to strict construction standards and widespread public education campaigns on the earthquake-prone island.

A magnitude 7.7 earthquake that struck in 1999 killed 2,400 people.

The two dead and four missing on Shakadang Trail include a family of five. The trapped bodies found on Friday were a man and a woman, but they have not been identified, according to Taiwanese media reports.

—AP

Quake aftershocks halt demolition of a leaning building

Taipei, 6 April

The demolition of a building that is leaning precariously after an earthquake in Taiwan was halted on Saturday because of aftershocks that made it lean even more, media reports said. The red building, about 10 stories tall and inclined over a street in the city of Hualien, has become an iconic image from the magnitude 7.4 earthquake that also buried people under boulders at nearby Taroko National Park, a popular hiking destination about 25 km northwest of Hualien. Six other people are still missing, including three on Shakadang Trail. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Indiabulls Real Estate to raise ₹3,911cr

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

Indiabulls Real Estate said its board has approved raising Rs 3,911 crore through the issuance of shares and warrants to investors, including the Blackstone Group and Embassy Group. Global investment firm Blackstone will invest Rs 1,235 crore, while the Bengaluru-based Embassy Group will infuse Rs 1,160 crore. After the conversion of the warrants, the Embassy Group will hold 18.7 per cent while Blackstone will own 12.4 per cent. In a regulatory filing on Friday, IBREL (Indiabulls Real Estate Ltd.) informed that the board has approved "fund-raise via preferential issue of equity shares and convertible warrants, on a private placement basis, for cash consideration, aggregating to approx. Rs 3,910.93 crore". The move is aimed at recapitalising its balance sheet and positioning the company for organic and inorganic growth purposes. These include capital expenditure for the completion of existing projects and new launches as well as proposed acquisitions, other working capital requirements and general corporate purposes. The board has approved the issuance of 9,13,55,606 fully-paid equity shares of a face value Rs 2 each of the company at Rs 111.51. *—PTI*

JSW raises ₹5K cr via QIP to fund growth plans

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

JSW Energy has raised Rs 5,000 crore through the Qualified Institutions Placement (QIP) route, said the power company late Friday."The proceeds from the QIP will bolster an already strong capital structure even further, significantly enhance our financial flexibility, and enable us to accelerate our ambitious growth plans," said Pritesh Vinay, director (finance) and chief financial officer of JSW Energy, in a statement. The company, in a disclosure earlier, had said the proceeds would be used for investments in JSW Neo Energy, a subsidiary which holds green energy assets and repayment of certain borrowings. The company said the issue garnered strong interest from marquee global investors, domestic mutual funds and insurance companies. JSW Energy added the QIP marks the first-ever equity raise by the company since its listing in 2010. It is the largest primary equity raise in the Indian power sector in a decade. *—PTI*

Livspace achieves cash flow positivity in India

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

Home renovation platform Livspace has become "cash-flow positive" in Indian business on the back of robust growth in its revenue, a top company official said. Livspace is expecting around 30 per cent growth in its revenue during the 2023-24 financial year from around Rs 1,100 crore in the preceding fiscal. The company's EBITDA losses narrowed to 95.35 million Singapore dollars from 96.86 million Singapore dollars during the period under review. "Our revenue has grown 50 per cent CAGR (compounded annual growth rate) in the past two fiscal years. We have become cash flow positive from October-December quarter of 2023-24 in India business, which is 80-85 per cent of our total revenue," Livspaceco Founder Ramakant Sharma said. Asked about the revenue during the last fiscal year, Livspace Chief Strategy Officer Ankit Shah said the numbers have not been finalised yet but the revenue could be around 30 per cent higher in 2023-24. He asserted that the company is not burning cash anymore and is generating enough cash flow to expand business organically. *—PTI*

India-Singapore bilateral trade grew 18.2% to $35.6B

FDI inflows stood at $155B from April 2000 to Dec 2023

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

The bilateral trade between Singapore and India rose to USD 35.6 billion in 2022-23, a growth of 18.2 per cent on the year, a senior diplomat at the Indian High Commission here said on Saturday.

Singapore is India's eighth largest trade partner (2022-23), with a share of 3.1 per cent of India's overall trade, T Prabakar, the First Secretary (Commerce) at the high commission said. He was addressing the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) Third International Conference being held in Singapore from 5-6 April.

Trade between Singapore and India saw a growth of 18.2 per cent in the year and rose to USD 35.6 billion in 2022-23, Prabakar said.

"Our imports from Singapore in FY 22-23 were USD 23.6 billion, a growth of 24.4 per cent, and exports to the city-state totalled USD 12 billion, up 7.6 billion in the previous financial year," he told some 100 delegates at the conference.

In terms of India's exports, Singapore is the sixth largest export destination in the world PHOTO: PTI

In terms of India's exports, Singapore is the sixth largest export destination in the world, and in terms of imports, the city-state is the eighth largest source for India globally during 2022-23.

It is not only in merchandise trade that India-Singapore ties are growing, Prabakar said, adding that FDI (foreign direct investment) equity inflows into India from Singapore during 2022-23 stood at USD 17.2 billion.

The cumulative FDI inflows from Singapore to India stood at USD 155.612 billion from April 2000 to December 2023, accounting for 23 per cent of the total FDI flows into India, he said.

- He also highlighted a wide range of strategic cooperation between the two nations in new fields, such as technologies, AI and green energy

Giving an overview of India-Singapore relations, Prabakar pointed out that Singapore is also amongst India's largest sources of External Commercial borrowings.

He also highlighted a wide range of strategic cooperation between the two nations in new fields, such as technologies, AI and green energy.

The two-day conference discussed a wide range of trade and technology issues, with ICSI members seeking insights into Singapore's law related to businesses that can be complementary to corporate and small enterprises in India. *—PTI*

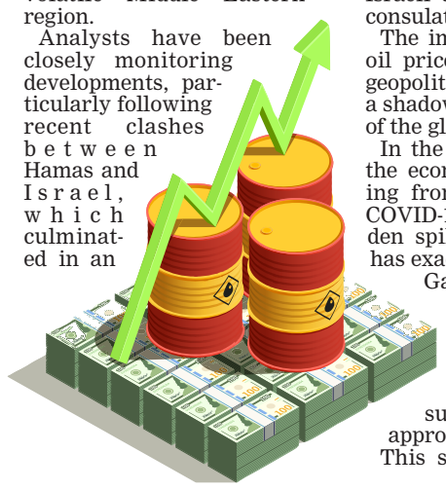
Global oil prices hit 6-month high

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

The price of Brent crude surged to a six-month high on Friday, surpassing the USD 91 per barrel mark, propelled by escalating tensions in the Middle East.

This sudden and significant uptick in oil prices has sent reverberations throughout global financial markets, reigniting fears of inflationary pressures and prompting deep concerns among central bankers, policymakers, and investors alike.

The global benchmark, Brent crude, has not reached these levels since October, driven primarily by mounting geopolitical tensions in the volatile Middle Eastern region.



Analysts have been closely monitoring developments, particularly following recent clashes between Hamas and Israel, which culminated in an Israeli airstrike on Tehran's consulate in Damascus, Syria.

The implications of surging oil prices extend far beyond geopolitical concerns, casting a shadow over various sectors of the global economy.

In the United States, where the economy is still recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sudden spike in gasoline prices has exacerbated concerns.

Gasoline prices have surged by a notable 6 per cent over the past month, a worrying development as the North American summer driving season approaches.

This surge in energy costs adds additional strain on consumers already grappling with elevated living expenses.

The Biden administration finds itself facing mounting challenges as it navigates the economic fallout of escalating oil prices.

The recent surge in oil prices has already had immediate repercussions across financial markets, with stock prices experiencing notable declines and crude oil prices witnessing sharp increases.

The S&P 500 is currently on track for its worst weekly performance since October, underscoring investor unease over the potential economic ramifications of escalating oil prices. *—ANI*

Maldives thanks India for exports

MALE, 6 APRIL

Maldivian Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer on Saturday said India's gesture to renew the quota to allow the export of certain quantities of essential commodities for his nation signifies the longstanding bilateral friendship and the commitment to further expand trade and commerce.

India allowed the export of certain quantities of essential commodities for the year 2024-25 at the request of the Maldives government, the Indian High Commission said here on Friday.Announcing the move through a post on X, the Indian High Commissioner said that this was being done "under a unique bilateral mechanism" under which the quotas for each of these items have been revised upwards.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar responded to Zameer's post, saying India stands firmly committed to its Neighbourhood First and SAGAR policies.

Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) is India's policy or doctrine of maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy underlines the renewed primacy that the country seeks to attach to its neighbouring countries.The 1981 India and Maldives trade agreement provides for the export of essential commodities. *—PTI*

Tesla said autonomous car would last 11 years PHOTO: X@INVESTINGCOM

Elon Musk says Tesla will unveil robotaxi on 8 Aug

TEXAS, 6 APRIL

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has announced that Tesla will unveil a 'robotaxi' on 8 August. He made the announcement in a post on X.

In a post on X, Musk stated, "Tesla Robotaxi unveil on 8/8." In the past, Musk has expressed liking for self-driving vehicles, stressing that they will be one of Tesla's most important products.

In the past, Elon Musk said that Tesla will make a car that did not have human controls. He had also said that Tesla cars, which will have full self-driving capability will through software, gradually become better and better at driving, CNN reported.

He said that the cars, at some point, will have the capability of operating as fully autonomous taxis and could earn money for their owners by giving taxi rides on their own.

So far, Tesla has passed several of Musk's predictions for when actual self-driving would be possible. In April 2019, Tesla said it expected to start operating robotaxis by 2020. The company predicted that the autonomous car would last 11 years and drive 1 million miles, which would make the company and the car operators earn a profit of USD 30,000 each year.

Elon Musk PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

However, Elon Musk has admitted that his track for predictions can be off sometimes by a mile. In an event in April 2019, he said, "The only criticism and it's a fair one, sometimes I'm not on time. But I get it done and the Tesla team gets it done," according to CNN report.Presently, people can buy full self-driving capability with a new Tesla Model 3 for an additional USD 12,000 added to the car's roughly USD 40,000 purchase price. *—ANI*

Grok available to premium subscribers

CALIFORNIA, 6 APRIL

Social network X is rolling out access to xAI's Grok chatbot to Premium tier subscribers after Elon Musk announced the expansion to more paid users last month. The company said on its support page that only Premium and Premium+ users can interact with the chatbot in select regions.

Last year, after Musk's xAI announced Grok, it made the chatbot available to Premium+ users — people who are paying USD 16 per month or a USD 168 per year subscription fee. With this users paying USD 8 per month can access the chatbot *—TechCrunch*

Deposit unlawful gains, says SEBI to finfluencer

MUMBAI, 6 APRIL

A financial influencer (finfluencer) who was also involved in imparting training related to stock market trading has been asked to part with a little over Rs 12 crore, which it made unlawfully.

The person, Ravindra Balu Bharti, is directed to credit/deposit the money to an interest bearing Escrow Account created specifically for the purpose in a nationalized bank. The Escrow Account(s) shall create a lien in favour of The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the monies kept therein shall not be released without the permission from SEBI, the regulator said in an order.

Ravindra Bharti Education Institute Pvt. Ltd. (RBEIPL):It is a company founded by Bharti in the year 2016, along with his wife, Shubhangi Bharti. The company claims to be primarily involved in imparting training/education related to stock market trading activities. RBEIPL is also having a functional website with the domain name:https://bhartisharemarket.com/.

SEBI, said the noticees shall also cease and desist from offering investment advisory services from acting as or holding themselves out to be investment advisors. *—ANI*

Meta to begin labelling AI-content from May

CALIFORNIA, 6 APRIL

Meta will begin labelling a wider range of video, audio and image content as "Made with AI" on its platforms, including Facebook and Instagram starting in May to counter manipulated media, according to its official statement.

Meta's new policy is a response to feedback from its independent Oversight Board, which urged an update to the current policy.

"We are making changes to the way we handle manipulated media based on feedback from the Oversight Board and our policy review process with public opinion surveys and expert consultations," Meta said.

The labels could be generated through self-disclosure when a user posts content, as a result of advice from fact-checkers, or via Meta detecting invisible markers of AI-made content.

"We will begin labelling a wider range of video, audio and image content as "Made with AI" when we detect industry standard AI image indicators or when people disclose that they're uploading AI-generated content," it added.Meta also underscored the usage of realistic AI-generated tools to create content like audio and photos and its evolution at present.

PHOTO: ANI

"In the last four years, and particularly in the last year, people have developed other kinds of realistic AI-generated content like audio and photos, and this technology is quickly evolving. As the Board noted, it's equally important to address manipulation that shows a person doing something they didn't do," it said.

New AI video tools increase worries of deepfakes ahead of elections. Experts worry malicious actors could use AI tools to create deepfakes, confusing and misleading voters in an election year.

Earlier last month, in a candid conversation with Microsoft co-founder, Bill Gates, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the challenges posed by AI and underlined the significance of initially using watermarks on AI-generated content to make users aware and prevent misinformation. *—ANI*

CENTRAL BANK SLOWDOWN

Reserve Bank leads surge in gold reserves

NEW DELHI, 6 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stood out with its continued accumulation of gold reserves. Weekly data from the RBI revealed a 6-tonne increase in gold holdings in February alone.

This brings the total year-to-date buying by the RBI to over 13 tonnes, with total gold reserves now reaching 817 tonnes.

India's consistent efforts to bolster its gold reserves reflect a strategy aimed at diversifying its foreign exchange reserves and mitigating risks associated with currency fluctuations and economic uncertainties.

While India remains a significant player in the global gold market, other central banks also contributed to the accumulation in February.

Central banks around the globe continued their steady accumulation of gold reserves, albeit at a slower pace compared to the previous month, in February.

This trend has been predominantly driven by emerging market banks, particularly those of India and China, as reported by the World Gold Council.

According to a report Published in the World Gold Council by Senior Analyst, EMEA World Gold Council, Krishna Gopal, global central banks increased their gold reserves by a net of 19 tonnes in February.

While this marks the ninth consecutive month of growth, it represents a significant slowdown from January, with a 58 per cent decrease in net purchases.

Despite the deceleration, the broader trend of central bank buying remains intact. Year-to-date data for January and February shows an addition of 64 tonnes, indicating a four-fold increase compared to the same period in 2022, although it's notably 43 per cent lower than the corresponding period in 2023.

PHOTOS: FREEPIK

- The People's Bank of China (PBoC) emerged as the largest buyer during the month, increasing its gold reserves by 12 tonnes

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) emerged as the largest buyer during the month, increasing its gold reserves by 12 tonnes.

However, amid the overall trend of accumulation, there were notable instances of selling as well.

Looking ahead, market observers anticipate the release of the next Gold Demand Trends report in late April, which will provide comprehensive insights into central bank demand for the entire first quarter of the year.

Overall, while the pace may have moderated in February, the underlying trend suggests that central banks, including India's RBI, remain committed to bolstering their gold reserves as a strategic hedge against global economic uncertainties. *—ANI*

EXPANDING MARKET

Amazon India unveils new 'Bazaar'

CALIFORNIA, 6 APRIL

Amazon has quietly introduced a "special store" called Bazaar in India, featuring affordable and trendy fashion and lifestyle products, as it ramps up efforts against Walmart-owned Flipkart and Reliance's Ajio, which have made deeper inroads in the Indian fast-fashion market.

The world's largest e-commerce firm has rolled out the new store on its India Android app. Amazon began recruiting sellers for the new store in February, TechCrunch previously reported, promising them "hassle-free" delivery, zero referral fees, and access to a vast customer base.

PHOTO: MTECH

"You can find items from clothing, accessories, and jewelry to handbags, shoes, traditional and western wear, and a wide array of home goods including kitchenware, towels, bed linens, and décor items," the company writes in a support page.

The growing popularity of affordable fast-fashion is increasingly driving purchases on many Indian shopping apps, making it crucial for Amazon to have a strong play in a category where it has traditionally struggled in the country, according to brokerage firm Bernstein.

- Amazon began recruiting sellers for the new store in February, TechCrunch previously reported, promising them "hassle-free" delivery, zero referral fees, and access to a vast customer base

"India e-commerce category mix is changing; Mobiles and Consumer electronics share is declining. Fashion has seen the strongest growth since FY19, and now holds the highest category share," Bernstein analysts wrote in a note last month.Bazaar's offerings include "trendy" t-shirts starting at 129 Indian rupees ($1.55) and sneakers priced under USD 3.India is a key overseas market for Amazon, which has invested more than $11 billion in the country to date. Despite the company's cloud unit, AWS, maintaining its market-leading position in India, Amazon's e-commerce arm holds the second spot behind Flipkart. *—TechCrunch*

Mayank is in focus as LSG eyes third win

LSG boasts a solid opening pair of Quinton de Kock and KL Rahul

LUCKNOW, 6 APRIL

New pace sensation Mayank Yadav will be closely followed by all and sundry after his match-winning performances as Lucknow Super Giants eye a hat-trick of wins when they take on an inconsistent Gujarat Titans in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Yadav has caught everyone's attention in the ongoing IPL with his raw pace and razor-sharp control, winning back-to-back player-of-the-match awards.

In his debut match against Punjab Kings, the 21-year-old returned impressive figures of 3/27, stunning England batter Jonny Bairstow with his searing pace.

He followed that performance with 3/14 figures against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, blowing away Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell with a 151kmph delivery, and then cleaned up his teammate Cameron Green.

Mayank Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

His spectacular performances have led to debates within the cricketing community about whether he should be fast-tracked into the Indian team.

But only two games can't be a parameter for a place in the Indian team. For Yadav, the crucial factor would be his consistency, which the national selectors will be closely following.

On the batting front, LSG boasts a solid opening pair of Quinton de Kock and KL Rahul. The South African has been in prime form after a rare off day in the team's opener but the skipper needs to get his act together as he hasn't been able to capitalise on starts.

The big-hitting Nicholas Pooran has been LSG's go-to-man in the finishing overs while Krunal Pandya was also handy in the last game.

But the major concern for the Lucknow outfit remains the form of Devdutt Padikkal and Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis.

In bowling, Yadav needs more support from the likes of Naveen-ul-Haq, Yash Thakur, Mohsin Khan, Stonis, and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi.

LSG, who are placed fourth with two wins out of three games, would also look to keep a clean slate at home and cash in on familiar conditions to register the third successive win this season. *—PTI*

Vidit Gujrathi dumps Nakamura; Gukesh downs Praggnanandhaa

TORONTO, 6 APRIL

Indian Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi crashed through the defenses of world number three Hikaru Nakamura of the United States, while R Praggnanandhaa went down to compatriot D Gukesh in the second round of Candidates chess tournament here.

After four draws in the first round, all four games in the second round ended decisively on Saturday.

Top seed American Fabiano Caruana was impressive in cruising past Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan and Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi outfoxed Firouza Alireza of France.

In the women's section, R Vaishali went down fighting against Zhongyi Tan of China, while Russian Aleksandra Goryachkina proved superior to Ukrainian Anna Muzychuk.

In the other games in this section, Koneru Humpy played out a draw with Kateryna Lagno of Russia and Nurgyul Salimova signed peace with Tinjie Lei of China.

R Praggnanandhaa went down to compatriot D Gukesh **PHOTO: AFP**

CANDIDATES CHESS

Gujrathi along with Caruana, Nepomniachtchi, and Gukesh emerged as the early co-leaders of the event with 1.5 points apiece while Nakamura, Praggu , Abasov, and Alireza share the fifth spot on half a point each.

In the women's section, Tan remained in sole lead with her second victory on the trot and Goryachkina was right behind her just half a point adrift.

Salimova, Humpy, and Lagno share the third spot with one point in their bags and Lei, Vaishali, and Muzychuk share the sixth spot with half a point to their credit.

A total of 12 rounds remain in the biggest competition of the year that will decide the challengers for the next world championships matches.

For the second day running, Gujrathi stole the show. The Indian has gotten past his last below-par performance in the Prague Masters.

—PTI

PHOTO: AFP

Verstappen takes pole at Japan GP for third year

DUBAI, 6 APRIL

Formula One world champion Max Verstappen took pole position for a third straight year at the Japanese Grand Prix on Saturday, with Sergio Perez qualifying a close second to ensure a Red Bull front-row lockout. Verstappen set the pace with a lap of one minute 28.197 seconds - 0.066 seconds clear of Perez - becoming the first driver to take pole in the opening four races of a season since Lewis Hamilton nine years ago. But with McLaren's Lando Norris, Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso in the other top five spots and all within half a second of Verstappen, Sunday's race promises to be a closer affair than the Dutchman's 2023 procession. "It was very close in the end," said Verstappen, looking to bounce back from a mechanical issue that prevented him from finishing the race last time out in Melbourne.*—AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Sumit Nagal beats 63rd-ranked Flavio in Monte Carlo

MONTE CARLO, 6 APRIL

SAce Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal was off to a winning start in the Monte Carlo Masters as he defeated world number 63 Flavio Cobolli of Italy in straight sets in the qualifiers here on Saturday. The unseeded 95th-ranked Indian registered a 6-2 6-3 win over eighth-seeded Cobolli. Nagal will now be up against the winner of the two Argentinians -- Facundo Díaz Acosta and Diego Schwartzman -- in his final qualifier fixture. While Acosta is ranked 55th and seeded third, Schwartzman is ranked 124th and is a wild card entrant in the tournament. Seven qualifiers will be granted entry into the main round. Nagal has been in the headlines since making it to the main draw of the Australian Open in January, where he had beaten Bublik of Kazakhstan before bowing out in the second round.*—AP*

TODAY'S MATCH

Gujarat Titans vs Lucknow Super Giants

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Ekana Stadium in Lucknow

Eng Test team needs common sense: Boycott

BENGALURU, 6 APRIL

Batting legend Geoffrey Boycott on Saturday reiterated his aversion for England's 'Bazball' way of cricket and exhorted the coaching staff to instill a dose of "common sense" in their methods.

The root of Boycott's criticism was England's failure to emerge winners in the two most important series -- in the Ashes against Australia in 2023 and in the series against India earlier this year.

"There are some amazing decisions under Brendon McCullum (England Test head coach), as he has changed the (team's) mindset into more positive. But they have gone a bit too far with it.

"They want to save England cricket, the whole of Test cricket. But no Sir, the objective is to win a Test match or series," said Boycott here during the cricket talk show, Midwicket Stories, which also featured batting legend Sunil Gavaskar and former New Zealand pacer Simon Doull.

Boycott said the England team should learn to respect opposition players and conditions. "We lost two Ashes Tests and with it the series, playing stupid cricket, and the same happened against India. They came to the series saying we have done practice in Abu Dhabi and all. But Players like (Ravichandran) Ashwin, (Ravindra) Jadeja. *—PTI*

Batting legend Geoffrey Boycott **PHOTO: AFP**

SKY is back in mix as Mumbai Indians falter

MUMBAI, 6 APRIL

A fit-again Suryakumar Yadav will be expected to immediately deliver the goods when faltering Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals lock horns in a bid to arrest their slide in their Indian Premier League clash here on Sunday.

With three losses in a row, MI are languishing at the bottom whereas Delhi Capitals have spiraled down to the ninth spot in the 10-team points table following a 106-run hammering in their last match. If MI has once again made a characteristic start of falling into a hole with a string of defeats, the misfiring Delhi Capitals have had a similar fate suffering three losses from four outings and are under pressure to bounce back. Suryakumar's potential return to action will keep him at the cynosure since the T20 World Cup follows this iteration of IPL immediately and his form and fitness will be crucial for the Indian campaign.For DC, comeback star Rishabh Pant (152 runs) has found consistency with two consecutive fifties but he needs support from the others.

Enduring the worst outing so far with the ball wherein DC bowlers kept erring with the line and lengths to allow Kolkata Knight Riders to pile up a humongous 272/7, the Pant-led side was short of spunk in reply with the bat to be bowled out for 166.

Suryakumar Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

David Warner (148 runs) and Tristan Stubbs have been marginally better than the other batters but Delhi will hope to get more out of swashbuckling Prithvi Shaw, for whom the Wankhede Stadium is a home ground. Mitchell Marsh has featured in each of Delhi's four matches so far but the burly Australian has not been able to impose himself on the opposition. Like a few others in his camp, Marsh too will be desperate to get a big score under the belt. Match Time: 3:30 PM IST. *—PTI*

LILLE BEAT MARSEILLE TO BOOST CHAMPIONS LEAGUE HOPES

DUBAI, 6 APRIL

Canadian star Jonathan David scored his 23rd goal of the season to set Lille on the way to a 3-1 win over Marseille on Friday that kept them firmly on course for next season's Champions League.

David's penalty put Lille ahead early in the second half. Remy Cabella doubled their lead on 71 minutes by scoring against his former club. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang claimed a goal back for Marseille, but substitute Gabriel Gudmundsson made sure of the victory for Lille late on. The northern side, who face Aston Villa next week in their first-ever European quarter-final in the Europa Conference League, move up to third in Ligue 1.

—AP

PHOTO: AFP

Bhambri-Olivetti pair exits Marrakech Open

MARRAKECH, 6 APRIL

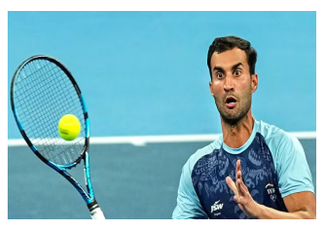
India's Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti crashed out of the Marrakech Open after losing the hard-fought semifinal to second seeds Lucas Miedler and Alexander Erler of Austria.

The unseeded Indo-French pair lost the grueling last-four stage match 5-7 6-3 7-10 in the ATP 250 clay court event on Friday night.

Bhambri and Olivetti had earlier knocked out third seeds Nicholas Barrientos and Rafael Matos in the quarterfinals. It was a closely contested match between the two pairs. Bhambri and Olivetti converted only two of the six breakpoints in the match while their opponents converted both their chances.

There was no let-up in the decider as the contest went down to the wire, where Miedler and Erler sealed the contest in the Super tie-breaker. Bhambri has teamed up with Olivetti for the first time this season, having played with Dutchman Robin Haase in most of the tournaments.

The Indian had paired with former partner Michael Venus from New Zealand at the Miami Masters where they made a first-round exit.



Yuki Bhambri **PHOTO: PTI**

Bhambri's best performance of the season came at in ATP 500 Dubai, whereas qualifiers the Indian and Haase reached the semifinals, earning crucial 225 ranking points.

Ranked 62, the 31-year-old Bhambri is India's second-highest-ranked player behind world number one Rohan Bopanna.

It will be interesting to see if Bopanna chooses Bhambri as his partner for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

Bopanna being a top-10 player will have the choice of selecting his partner.

Bhambri confirmed to PTI that as of today he has not heard from Bopanna about the possible pairing. *—PTI*

BHULLAR LIFTS CHANDIGARH OPEN TROPHY

CHANDIGARH, 6 APRIL

Star golfer Gaganjeet Bhullar lived up to his billing, carding a solid four-under 68 on the final day to clinch the Chandigarh Open title with a record total here on Saturday.

Bhullar (67-67-65-68), a 12-time international winner who was playing at his home course this week, set a record for the lowest winning total at the Chandigarh Golf Club en route to the title. Bhullar bagged his 25th career title and 13th win on the PGTI after taking his week's tally to 21-under 267, which happened to be the lowest winning total at the Chandigarh Golf Club. Bhullar's third win at the Chandigarh Golf Club saw him eclipse the previous best 72-hole total at the venue which was 20-under 268 achieved by Ajeetesh Sandhu. *—PTI*

Gaganjeet Bhullar **PHOTO: PTI**

RISHABH'S FORM IS FANTASTIC

Let a few IPL matches go: Ganguly on T20 WC selection

MUMBAI, 6 APRIL

Former India skipper Sourav Ganguly said on Saturday that Rishabh Pant is "fully fit" but added that the wicketkeeper-batter should be given some more time to prepare himself for India team selection for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the West Indies and USA.

Pant, the Delhi Capitals skipper seems to be hitting his strides in the ongoing IPL with consecutive half-centuries after returning to professional cricket following a harrowing car crash in December 2022.Asked if he thinks Pant is ready for selection in the India squad, Ganguly, who is DC's director of cricket, said after a team training session: "Let a few more matches go. He is doing very well.

As you all must have seen, you know, (wicket) keeping, batting. He has held up well."His form has been fantastic, especially the way he has batted in the last two games. Let another week go by, and I'll be able to answer that question... provided the selectors want to pick him -- that's most important. He's fit, fully fit," Ganguly added.

Pant is currently the fourth-highest run-getter in IPL 2024, having scored 152 runs in four matches at a strike rate of nearly 160.DC will take on the embattled five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium on Sunday.

Ganguly added that he was satisfied with the bowling department but the team, which has lost three of its four matches so far this season, could do with an extra batter."We have used the bowling part of it well in terms of Mukesh (Kumar), who's developed under Delhi Capitals, Khaleel (Ahmed) and Ishant (Sharma)."Prithvi Shaw... he's come back into good form this season. Rishabh is a domestic Indian talent.

Actor and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) co-owner Shah Rukh Khan greets Delhi Capitals' captain Rishabh Pant **PHOTO: PTI**

Abhishek Porel has started well this season. We need to find one more batsman who can do it.We saw (Sameer) Rizvi play for Chennai, he also got a very high price tag."The stylish former batter felt that Indian talent would flourish in the IPL as it is getting lots of opportunities."

Sourav Ganguly **PHOTO: PTI**

There's a lot of Indian talent who's doing well in IPL. (We) saw (Riyan) Parag do well for Rajasthan so far. Then there is Punjab (Kings') Shashank Singh, who did well in the last game. Prabhsimran is also doing well for Punjab," he said."There are a lot of young talents around in the IPL and that's the way it has been over some time.

It's a platform for young talent to come and play well. And, the more opportunities they are given, they will play well as the tournament progresses."

Ganguly does not want to read too much into Mumbai Indians' dismal performance so far. The five-time champions have lost all three games so far this season."Mumbai is a good side. We are a good team as well. We won one game against Chennai. We expect Mumbai to play well because they've been a great franchise over a long period. They have some quality players in the squad," he said."But T20 is such a format that sometimes you get into this situation where you lose. *—PTI*